JANUARY, 1934

Weird Tales

JAN.—25c

The Red Knife of Hassan

a Jules de Grandin mystery-thriller

By SEABURY QUINN

A. MERRITT

J. WILLIAMSON

D. H. KELLER

R. E. HOWARD

C. A. SMITH

WEIRD TALES

Vol. 23, No. 1—25c

THE SHREWD PLACE
TO STAY IN CHICAGO

THRIFTY travelers have discovered that the big, fine hotels are not all confined to the high rent district—that one may live very comfortably outside of the "Loop" at considerably less expense. In short, they've discovered The Southmoor. Facing beautiful Jackson Park, Hotel Southmoor is only ten or fifteen minutes from the "Loop" by Illinois Central Express Service. The Rapid Transit Elevated lines are also close by—with buses and street cars passing the door.

The shrewd traveler figures what ten or fifteen minutes' time is really worth—and decides that the money saved at The Southmoor is worth decidedly more.

Rates that challenge duplication for the same fine service

	Day	Week	Month
Single rooms with bath as low as -----	$2.50	$15.00	$50.00
Double rooms with bath as low as -----	4.00	17.50	60.00

Suites and kitchenettes at equally low prices

HOTEL SOUTHMOOR

Facing Jackson Park Stony Island at 67th Street

Phone FAIrfax 5100 **Norman J. Fellman, Mgr.**

A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

Volume 23 | CONTENTS FOR JANUARY, 1934 | Number 1

Cover Design ..... M. Brundage
Illustrating a scene in "The Red Knife of Hassan"

The Solitary Hunters ..... David H. Keller 3
A powerful story of the blood-freezing horror awaiting the men who were sent to a living death in the crater of an extinct volcano

The Red Knife of Hassan ..... Seabury Quinn 22
A thrill-tale of the Assassins of Syria—an exploit of Jules de Grandin

Place Names ..... Katharine van der Veer 42
Verse

Invaders of the Ice World ..... Jack Williamson 43
A weird-scientific tale of the far-distant future, when the sun dims, and creatures spawned by the frost make war upon the survivors of the human race

Too Late ..... Alfred I. Tooke 58
Verse

A Phantom in the Sky ..... Dale Clark 59
A strange tale of an aviator's weird experience in a doomed airplane

Rogues in the House ..... Robert E. Howard 68
A swift-moving tale of the squatting monstrosity that sat in the death-chambers of Nabonidus

The Weaver in the Vault ..... Clark Ashton Smith 85
A story of the weird doom that came upon the searchers in the tombs of Chaon Gacca

The Vampire Master (conclusion) ..... Hugh Davidson 94
A novel of corpses that would not stay dead, and a gruesome horror in the New York hills

In the Triangle ..... Howard Wandrei 109
A brief, strange tale about a weird beast and an old man in gray

Candles ..... Dorothy Quick 113
Verse

Weird Story Reprint:
The Woman of the Wood ..... A. Merritt 114
One of the most popular stories from WEIRD TALES of several years ago

The Eyrie 132
A chat with the readers

Possession ..... Julius Long 136
A short but intensely interesting weird tale

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the post office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, $3.00 a year in the United States, $4.00 a year in Canada. English office: Charles Lavell, 13, Serjeant's Inn, Fleet Street, E. C. 4, London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

NOTE—All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publishers' Chicago office at 840 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

Copyright, 1934, by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company.

COPYRIGHTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

Don't Miss—

Speed Planes for Moscow

a timely story

By S. GORDON GURWIT

The Spider Woman

By SEABURY QUINN

The Shadow of the Vulture

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

See your magazine dealer today!

New Issue Now On Sale

Genuine Autographed First Edition Copies of

OTIS ADELBERT KLINE'S

THRILLING FANTASTIC NOVEL

The Prince of PERIL

EXCITING, SWIFT-MOVING ACTION

"The Prince of Peril" is a fantastical yarn which gives new evidence of the marvelous powers of Otis Adelbert Kline's vivid imagination and writing skill. Another outstanding characteristic is the terrific action—a startling new adventure on every page, each one more electrifying and stimulating than the last!

Through the fabric of this violent adventure is woven a bright thread of romance which makes the entire fantasy, with all its tumult and turbulence, seem realistic and probable to even the most skeptical.

Read the weird adventures of Zinlo, man of three worlds, upon the mysterious planet of Venus.

Act Now!

While they last, you can get a copy of this special first edition autographed by the author, at the regular price of an ordinary edition. Bound in rich linen cloth with attractive three colored jacket. Remember, first editions grow more valuable with the years, and when autographed become doubly valuable. Order today!

WEIRD TALES, BOOK DEPT. KPP
840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Illinois.

I enclose $2. Send at once, postage prepaid, an autographed copy of "The Prince of Peril" as per your offer.

Name _____

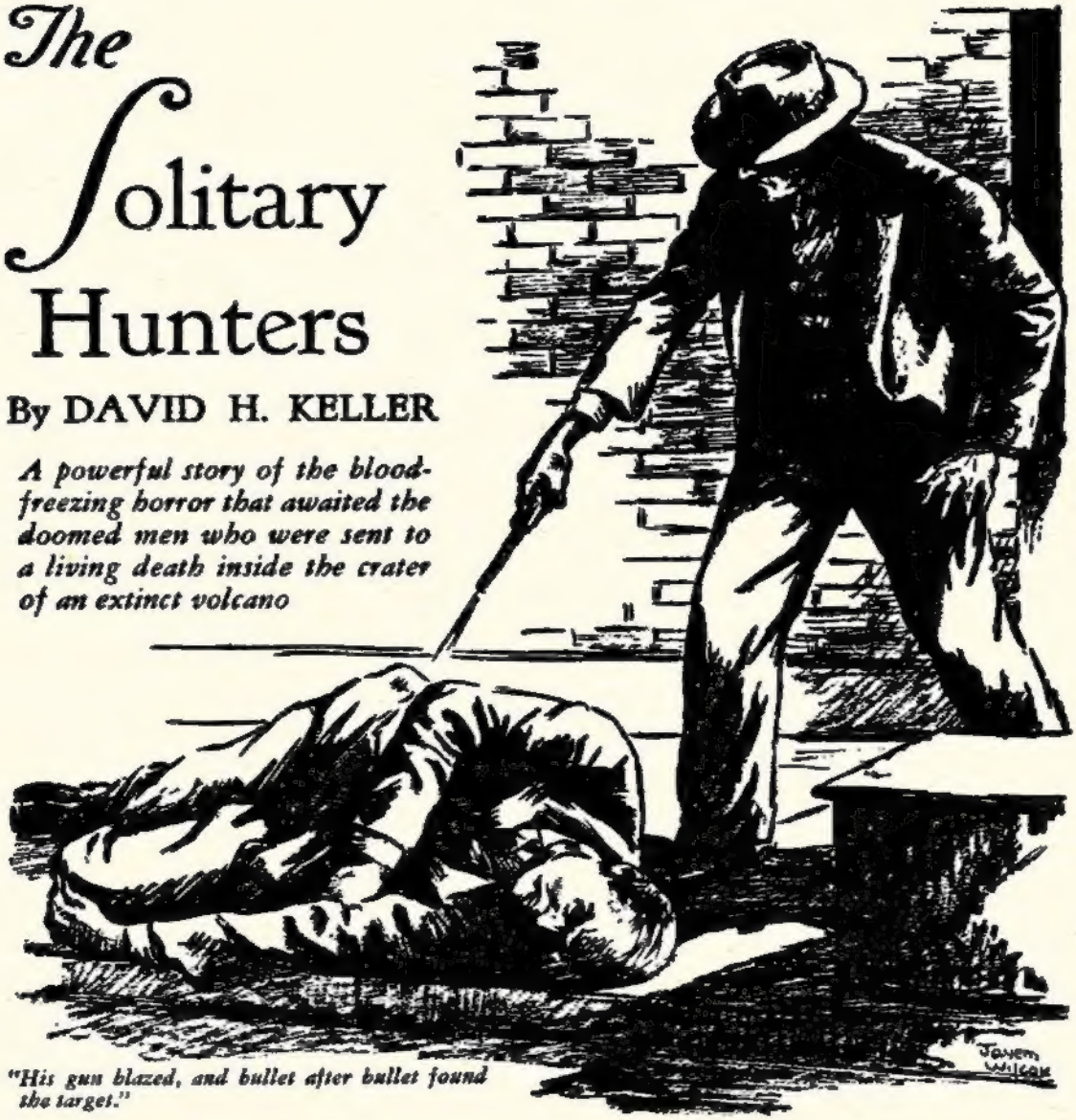
Address _____

City _____ **State** _____

The Solitary Hunters

By DAVID H. KELLER

A powerful story of the blood-freezing horror that awaited the doomed men who were sent to a living death inside the crater of an extinct volcano



"His gun blazed, and bullet after bullet found the target."

1. Work at Last

"SO YOU want work?"

"Certainly," I replied. "That is why I am here. I saw your advertisement in the *Times*. It was rather unusual, but I needed a job."

"A job? or a position?"

"It does not make any difference, so long as it gives me an income."

"You know everything about bugs?"

"Not everything. No one does; still I have taught about them in Cornell and Columbia. But few of the undergraduates are interested in butterflies and ants and such things. They want to learn how to make money; so I lost my position as assistant professor, and here I am."

"Not married?"

"No. Been too busy so far even to fall in love."

"Dependents?"

"None."

"Looks as though you were my man, and this were your job."

"That suits me. What do you want me to do?"

"Take this gun and kill a man for me."

I reached over and took my hat off the table.

"Better look for another man," I said softly. "I may be poor but I am by no means a criminal."

"Sit down. You didn't get me right. We will have a dead man on the street, and you go and put a few lead pills into him. Along come the bulls, and catch you, red-handed. They will think they have everything, body, revolver and the murderer. They will convict you of murder in the first degree, and send you up for life. That is where your real work will begin."

"You mean that I am to allow myself to be sent as a life prisoner to Rose Crater?"

"Precisely!"

"Do you know anything about that prison?"

"I know what is common knowledge, but there are a number of points concerning which I am ignorant. That is what you are for."

Once again I rose from the chair and took my hat in my hand. But the man took me by the shoulder.

"Don't go," he urged. "I am in earnest."

"So am I," I replied, rather angrily. "You must think that just because I am a college professor and out of work I am nothing but a fool! If you want to know about Rose Crater, why not ask the Government? I understand that it is a national institution, or something of that kind. At least it is only used for Federal prisoners convicted under the Interstate Criminal Act. Suppose you did want to make a private investigation? Why not hire a detective agency to do your work for you? Certainly not a college professor who is more interested in ants than in criminals and in butterflies than prison. And to go there as a criminal! As a murderer! I may be poor, but I still have my good name. What would my friends think?"

The man took me by both shoulders and jammed me into an overstuffed armchair. I was surprized to see the tremendous strength he had.

"You have to listen to me, Professor. I am supposed to be a gangster; in fact, I am supposed to be their leader, their brains in America. Guess I had to have some intelligence to be a free man today, but I am not bragging about my Harvard connection. Neither am I doing anything to show you that I am one of the rich men of America. If power or wealth or brute force could be employed so that I could find out what I wanted to about Rose Crater, I should have enough of all three. But it takes more than that. Some one has to go in there and come out, and so far the road to that prison is a one-way road. The prisoners go in, *but they never come out. Not even after they die.* I am looking for a man brave enough to go in, intelligent enough to find out what is going on in there and clever enough to escape. If he comes through with it, he can ask me his wages, and I will give him anything he asks. If he is not the right man, he simply stays there and meets the same end the other men have met."

I looked at the man rather carefully. My previous conceptions of the Emperor of the Underworld did not harmonize with what I saw. Was he a Harvard graduate? Probably an All-American football player in his younger days! What was his name then? Certainly not Serpolis. There was nothing of the gangster in his appearance, clothing, face; yet he was credited with being the rigid ruler of all the criminal classes of our

country, the man who had successfully flouted every authority and who had made the nation at least turn in desperation to the Interstate Criminal Act and from there to Rose Crater. As I looked at him, I almost pitied him. The man obviously was in trouble and needed help.

"You have sent other men in?" I asked. It was a question asked at random. Before I had asked it I knew the answer.

"Several," he whispered. "I could name them, but what would be the use? They went in because I ordered it. They have stayed in because they had to. I never heard from them. We had elaborate plans for communication. I have told you how ineffective they were."

"Let's be honest with each other," I said sincerely. "What makes you think I could succeed when others have failed?"

"I do not think. I only know that I am in hopes that some day I shall be able to send a man in there who will come back. Every man I have sent in has had different qualifications. This time I thought I would try an entomologist."

"Queer," I said with a laugh. "Every prison has its distinctive types of bugs, but no one has ever deliberately sent a specialist in their study to prison so that he could solve the hidden problems of that penal institution. No doubt the Bastille and Sing Sing would all be interesting subjects of insect study from the historic as well as the modern approach; but I still fail to see how an entomologist will be better able to get out of Rose Crater than other types of men. Where desperate men have failed, how can a placid student of bugs hope to succeed?"

FOR answer he walked over to his desk, unlocked a drawer, and took out some pictures. As he walked toward me he picked up a large reading-glass.

"As a part of my study of the place," he commented, placing the pictures and the glass in my hands, "I have had an extensive survey of the prison made from airplane. Over seven hundred exposures in all, over a period of some years. Most of them showed the same thing. A few were different. These are the odd ones. Look at them."

I did so. For nearly half an hour I studied them.

"These are faked!" I exclaimed at last. "Impossible!"

"No. They are the real thing. I have the greatest confidence in the man who made them for me."

"It would make no difference to me if you told me that you took them yourself," I answered.

"Why?" he demanded.

"Because they can not be true. Everything is all out of proportion. Take this particular picture. Do you think that this object is a man? Of course you are going to say 'yes.' Suppose he is an average man, five feet eight. Then the rest of the picture is a lie."

"You would be willing to say so if you actually saw it, wouldn't you? I mean if you were there and saw it, not just a picture, you would be willing to say so?"

"No. I should think I was drunk, delirious, insane!"

"But suppose you just knew that you were none of these?"

"When water runs up-hill, when the sun sets in the east and when animals talk like men, then something like this might happen, but not now."

"But I have talked with scientists. I have visited the Academy of Natural Sciences. Things like that used to happen, didn't they?"

"Yes. Millions of years ago, perhaps, but not now. Not in 1943."

"I am not so sure. At least you go in

and see for yourself. I'll pay you well, when you return."

"You don't have to pay me — just finance me," I cried. "If these pictures are true I would go anywhere, do anything to see similar ones. Of course I would want Munchausen to lie about them and Doré to draw them and Dante to add them to his Hell, but I would insist on measuring and dissecting and writing them up for the Smithsonian Institution. One more question. Sure I'll go for you. You can not keep me from going now, but I want to know one thing more before I start. What is your special interest in all this?"

"My daughter was sent there six years ago."

"They never send women there!" I insisted.

"They didn't know she was a woman." He looked old as he said it. "And I am not sure they knew she was my daughter."

2. *The Department of Justice*

THE letters of introduction I carried with me were powerful enough to give me entry to almost every one I wanted to see in Washington. Of course it was hard to be sure that every one told me the truth, but in a few days I found out enough to enable me to become at least a little oriented with the problem.

The Department of Justice assigned Walter Stafford to answer my questions. The man making the introduction simply stated,

"If you are interested in penology, Stafford can tell you more about our prisons than any other man in America."

I talked about the high cost of living, the latest revue on Broadway and the debt cancellation problem, but at last we were together in his private office.

"What do you want to know?" he said.

"All you know about Rose Crater," was my swift reply.

"I thought so," he sighed. "To date you are No. 101 to ask that question. I can tell you what led up to it, about Senator Gowers and his Interstate Criminal Act, but after that—nothing."

"You mean you don't want to? Are your hands tied, your mouth sealed?"

"No. Nothing like that. I would tell you if I knew."

"But you are said to be an authority on Federal prisons."

"I am; that is, on all except one. The reason I can not tell you very much about Rose Crater is because I don't know very much. No one does. That is why it has been so criticized, and perhaps it is also why it is so effective."

"Would you tell me what you do know?"

"According to my orders I have to. It will not take long. You are old enough to know about the crime wave that swept over the nation after the World War. The best minds of the United States felt that something had to be done but no one seemed to know just what. The judiciary was being corrupted, business was intimidated, and the average citizen was in constant fear of his life. The racket invaded all parts of our social order. When a man sent his shirt to the laundry, bought a ton of coal, moved from one apartment to another, and at last when he raised his children or buried his dead, he paid tribute to some form of racket. Serpolis was given credit for being at the head of all of it, but perhaps he simply became an American symbol for every vice and crime known to mankind.

"Occasionally a criminal was convicted. Usually he was never even apprehended, or, if caught, was released on bail and never brought to trial. The laws were made more and more severe, but as fewer

and fewer convictions were made, they failed to repress crime.

"Then kidnapping was added as a racket, and finally even the Vice-President of the United States was blackmailed, and then Congress realized that something had to be done to save the nation. So they passed the Gowers Act. It provided for life imprisonment with absolutely no communication with the world. Even when the prisoner died, his friends and family were not to be informed. It was called solitary confinement for life, but it really turned out to be a living death. Belgium had tried something like that, but not so drastic and never for more than a ten-year period, and even then half of the convicts became insane.

"It was easy to pass the act, but it was harder to construct such a prison and still more difficult to find a man to serve as warden. The penologists had been rather softened by the mental hygiene experts and there were any number of prominent psychologists who denounced the act as barbaric in its severity.

"Just as they thought the act might fail through the inability to put it into execution, the owner offered Rose Crater to the government free of charge. He even offered to care for the prisoners free. He promised that they would be well cared for during life, that it would be impossible for them to escape, and equally impossible for them to communicate with the outside world. All he asked for was the authority to protect Rose Crater from assault by airplane and to determine the number of prisoners he was asked to take every year. And there was to be no Governmental inspection.

"You probably remember the furor his offer made. He appeared before a Senate committee and voluntarily offered to bond himself for twenty-five million dollars, the bond to be forfeited if even one of the prisoners escaped. It was his idea that he could care for five hundred the first year and after that a thousand. The rumor is that one of the senators asked him how he could do it. His answer was, 'Every year some of them will die.'

"At last the bill was passed and Rose Crater was named as the prison. The idea was that each year a thousand of the worst criminals in America would be sent there. If, at the end of twenty-five years, such severity resulted in less crime, other similar prisons could be built.

"Fortunately the decision as to who were to constitute the thousand each year was delegated to the Supreme Court. They could not be bribed, and after the third year, by which time twenty-five hundred had been put through Hellgate, hundreds of criminals left the country of their own accord. There is no doubt that things are better than they were."

"But Serpolis is still at liberty," I objected.

"Yes, but even his wings are clipped. I do not believe it is as easy for him as it was."

"You spoke of Hellgate?"

"Yes. That is the name the underworld gives the only entrance to the prison. The criminals go in, a thousand of them on the first of April of every year, and none has ever come back. It is a one-way road; so they call it Hellgate."

"And there has never been any Government inspection?"

"No. You see, it is not Government property. It belongs to an individual who is furnishing the nation a service, and part of the contract is that he is not to be molested by inspectors."

"Then no one knows what happens on the other side of the door?"

"No. There have been a thousand surmises, but no one really knows, and I am not sure that any one really cares

except the families of the men who are there."

"Just men there?"

"Yes. They thought it was hard enough for men, without sending women up for life."

I THANKED Stafford for his kindness.

"It looks as though I should have to believe you," I said, "but the whole thing seems rather un-American to me. The French might do a thing like that at Devil's Island, but never the good old U. S. A. Besides, I have faith in the intelligence of my countrymen. It seems incredible that over seven thousand of these men, even though they are criminals, would fail to find a way of escape. At least one man ought to have made good."

Walter Stafford laughed.

"You don't know Rose Crater, and perhaps you over-estimate the intelligence of the men sent there as prisoners. The place is just what the name implies, the crater of an old volcano. Some old traveler thought it was shaped like a rose and the name stuck. About two miles in diameter and over a quarter-mile deep, and walls smooth as glass. The man who offered the place to the Government had tunneled through the wall. Occasionally they take supplies through that tunnel, and once a year the convicts go in. That is all, except that they never come out."

"You use the words, 'that man.' Don't they know his name? He must be rich to be able to put up a bond of that size, and to feed and provide for all that mob of men?"

Walter Stafford laughed for the second time right in my face.

"His name is Hamford James. Does that mean anything?"

"Not a thing."

"Well, here are the high spots. His old man left him over a hundred million. Hamford put it into a trust and went to South America. He came back twenty years ago, bought a couple of counties in the Bad Lands of South Dakota, bored a tunnel into the crater and made his home there. For all I know he is living there yet, with the criminals."

"Must be an odd character."

"Looks like it."

"How about his payroll? Must be a lot of men working for him. They must come out at times. What do they say about the inside?"

"There again we come up against a stone wall. If Hamford James has men working for him, he keeps them there like the convicts. At least, they do not come out."

"Sure of that?"

"Absolutely. We have had the Secret Service working on that part. The Government is thankful to Rose Crater for making a difficult situation easy, but there is a feeling that there should be a little more known about Rose Crater than there is. But I have honestly told you all we know. Of course, we could send men down in parachutes, but we promised him eight years ago to leave him alone, and we really have kept our promise."

THAT night, in my hotel room, I did a lot of thinking. Here was a chance to gain renown as a detective, even become greater than Sherlock Holmes, or Taine of San Francisco. Then I gave the matter a second thought and knew that there was a good place to die.

After that decision it was not a good night to sleep; so I took a train to New York. At seven in the morning I sent my card in to Serpolis. I had been in close touch with him, but, of course, he did not expect me to call on him before breakfast. He was as much of a gentle-

man as ever, even though he had been disturbed at that early hour and while shaving.

"Sorry," I apologized, "but I was in Washington last night and could not get to sleep. I just had to come and talk to you. Do you know anything about Hamford James?"

"You mean the James who owns Rose Crater?"

"Yes. I heard something about him. Do you know how much it is costing him to run the place?"

Serpolis looked puzzled.

"What has that to do with it, Mr. Kingston?" he asked.

"Just an idea of mine. It seems that either James has a very devoted following or he is running the place by himself. At least, there is nothing to show that any of his employees have ever come out for a vacation. It seems that he has not been seen himself for ten years. Allowing for a fairly high death rate, there ought to be over six thousand criminals in confinement in Rose Crater by this time. Surely he is not taking care of all of them himself. And I want to know what he is feeding them, what it is costing him, what he is doing it for. That is the thing! His motive! Could you have his account investigated? Some one is paying the bills. We might learn something."

"I'll start that today," the gangster assured me. "Anything else?"

"Yes. The Gowers Act forbids sending women to Rose Crater."

"I know that," said Serpolis.

3. I Am Warned

MAKING an appointment to see him in a few days, I left Serpolis and went to my apartment. It was in an inconspicuous place in the Bronx and was leased under an assumed name. I had hardly shaved and started reading my morning mail when the telephone rang.

"Gentleman to see you, Mr. Newton," said the desk clerk.

"Send him up."

A few minutes later I opened my door and asked the stranger to come in.

"My name is Professor Roberts, Mr. Kingston," he said.

"Wrong man," I replied with a smile. "My name is Newton."

"So they told me at the desk, and I thought it best not to argue the question with them. Every man has the right to privacy, and if you want to be Newton in the Bronx, that is your business; but, now that we are alone, you can be your real self, Professor Kingston, who is rather well known throughout the scientific world as an authority on the Hexapods. We heard that you were at present unassociated with any university; so Warren College of Georgia sent me to see you with authority to offer you a full professorship, ten thousand a year and very satisfactory extra allowances."

"No. Sorry, but there are two reasons. First, I am not worth that much, and second, I have work to do."

"Here is our contract. Better sign on the dotted line and come back to Georgia with me."

But I sent him away with a blunt refusal, and went back to my correspondence. Queer the pranks life plays. A week ago I would have thrilled at the opportunity, and now I had to turn it down, and take in exchange, what?

By noon I had another caller. Nothing collegiate about this man. He was well dressed and clean-shaven, but if he was not a criminal, I was badly mistaken.

"I have come to give you a little advice, Professor."

"Who asked you?"

He ignored my question.

"This morning you had a chance to become a professor at Warren College, Georgia. It would be good for your health if you accepted. In fact, I am advising you to do so."

I was rather nervous that morning, loss of sleep, too much thinking and all that sort of thing; so my temper got the best of me and I asked him to get out. He went, but as he reached the door, he turned.

"Men who know the stuff you know had better stay in a college," he hurled at me. "You don't belong in the underworld and you know it. You are too soft. What are you doing it for?"

"My business and not yours."

"Well, keep away from Serpolis, if you value your health."

And that was something more that was food for thought.

Following the line of research it suggested, I called on every employment agency catering to college men. I sent telegrams to those in Chicago, St. Louis, Denver and San Francisco. The answer was the same. There were plenty of openings, and good ones, for specialists in entomology. All they had to do was apply and state their terms.

So I went over to Boston for a week. I wanted to talk to some men over there who were authorities in their line. But I was back in New York in time to keep my appointment with Serpolis. I had an idea that we should have some things of interest to talk over.

He seemed pleased to see me.

"I FOLLOWED your suggestion," he stated in his smooth, cultured voice. "It was a little difficult, but I can tell you just about every pound of sugar or box of crackers that has gone into Rose Crater for the last seven years. I am not a food specialist, but it looked peculiar to me, so I secured the opinion of a dietician, and here is the situation. Every year, starting the first of April, they begin sending in the convicts. It takes about a week to transport the thousand men. Late in March they send in the yearly supply of food. There are no shipments after April first. And here is the joker: the dietician says that every year there is just enough food to take care of one thousand men for two months. In other words, if there are six thousand convicts, there is food enough for only ten days. Of course, there may be a farm there, but it does not show in any of the pictures. Here is another interesting fact: more sugar than anything else, and in the form of cane sirup, real cane sirup from Louisiana. They get that by the hundred barrels, more than even six thousand men could possibly eat. What do you think?"

"Perhaps James is keeping his pets in submission by starving them."

"No. It is not just starvation. They could not even starve on what is sent in, and how about the sugar?"

"I don't know," I cried; "I just don't know. It is one more thing to find out. But here is my contribution to the mystery. Some organization is after me. They offered me a full professorship, and when I refused, they threatened me, and every entomologist in America has a job at his own terms. How about that?"

"Do you think I don't realize it? Remember my advertisement? How many men do you think answered it? Just one, yourself. Where were the other specialists? Working, contented, good incomes. For some reason they overlooked you. But they were watching me. I can not move without being shadowed, and when you came to my office and then went to Washington, they realized they had slipped up on one insect specialist, and they got busy. Now I am going to ask you a question. What reason is there for

the demand for entomologists? Why ignore the chemists or the geologists? Just to work out my pet idea, I have advertised for specialists of all kinds and have had them write by the hundreds, but when I ask for entomologists I find they are all busy and satisfied. I hire one, and at once he is offered a position and threatened when he refuses. Does it mean anything to you?"

"Obviously, the first thing to think about is the fact that Rose Crater has broken up your organization; so every one knows you are interested in it. That is primary. The next thing is——"

He interrupted me, almost with pathetic earnestness, "The next thing is those pictures."

"I still refuse to accept them as authentic."

"But is there any connection between them and the cane sirup?"

"No. That is, there is none if the pictures are faked."

"But suppose they are real?"

"I can not believe that they are."

"Is there any one who could tell—whose opinion would be worth while?"

That made me think a while. At last it came to me.

"Spartins of London. He is about seventy. He is not a man but a tradition. He knows more about insects than any human being living. He has studied them so long that they say he looks like one. I would like to know what he would say; but then I know. He would say the same as I say."

"You go over and ask him," ordered Serpolis: "I will send you over on my private airship. No one knows I own it. We shall have to be careful about it, because there is no doubt you are being watched. You register at the Strand Hotel under the name of Prince, and I will have the pictures delivered to you there, and don't be shy with the cash. You get his opinion, no matter what his fee is."

4. I Become a Criminal

EVEN at that time, as I left Serpolis, I thought that he was over-anxious concerning my welfare. Once on the street it seemed to be an easy matter to be lost in the crowd, but I was soon to learn that the reverse was true.

Crossing Forty-Second Street an old lady jostled me and at once raised a cry of "Stop, thief!" as she caught my arm. A policeman heard her screams and there I was, nicely caught. Not much use in saying I was innocent when the pocketbook was found in my overcoat. "Tell it to the judge," growled the minion of the law.

I had heard that justice moved on leaden heels in the large cities, but in this case I was sentenced to the workhouse within an hour. I even pleaded guilty. Under the circumstances it seemed to be the best thing to do. No use advertising my connection with Serpolis or giving the newspapers a chance for a nice story. Besides, there had always been a curiosity on my part in regard to the workhouse.

Fate, however, was once again victor in the game of chess. After an hour in jail I was brought back to the magistrate's office and released with a sharp reprimand. Who was my friend? None other than the Georgia professor, with his everlasting contract and a polite request to sign on the dotted line for a four years' period of teaching.

Once again I had to smile at the queerness of life. Two weeks ago starving, and nobody cared, and now two influences fighting over the possession of my body. It seemed as though I were a person of some importance, probably the only entomologist at large.

I signed the paper, arranged to meet

the man that evening and go to Georgia with him. Then I beat it to my apartment in the Bronx, destroyed a few papers, slipped the janitor a hundred dollars and went from the twenty-second floor to the sub-basement in the dumbwaiter, down the food shaft and out to the street under a load of trash. It was at least a novel experience, and to that extent a pleasing one.

From that time on our plans worked perfectly. It was no trouble at all to find the airship, and Serpolis had made all the necessary arrangements. I had taken a few air trips, but never in any thing as luxuriant as this plane, of which I was to be the only passenger, with a crew of seven to do my bidding.

"Put me to bed," was my only command.

Of course, I was tired, the air was bracing, and the food good. The forty-eight-hour trip was just long enough to give me all the sleep and food I wanted. It was slow time in comparison with that made by some solo flyers, but fast enough for me. It seemed strange, the comparison between the rapidity of science and the slowness of mortals. Human invention had made every convenience a possibility to the industrious man. Life consisted of four-hour work-days, desires and push-buttons; yet crime had been on the rampage, and finally had reached a point where civilization had to invent a Rose Crater to protect itself from the wolves of the underworld. Serpolis was the old man of the wolves, a little cautious now, but still a power, one of the rich men of the nation.

Still, he was not happy. In a moment of confidence he said that he would be willing to become a pauper if it would bring him his little girl back home. Most of the time he had called her his daughter, but this time, with tears in his voice, he had used the words, Little Girl. She was just one more of the mysteries of the last two weeks, really the leading, motivating mystery. The pictures and the cane sugar were hard enough to solve, but what was a girl doing in Rose Crater?

The airship landed in the suburbs of London, and I went to the Strand Hotel. That night I read about my death. The private plane of Serpolis, the American gangster, had been flying low in the fog and had run against the white cliffs of Albion. Full details and passenger lists were lacking, but it was positively known that Professor Kingston, the well-known entomologist, had lost his life in the wreck. It was unknown just what his connection was with the chief of American racketeers, but that was an unnecessary question now. Probably just another variety of putting a man "on the spot," to use foreign slang. The body was at the morgue awaiting further identification and instructions from New York as to the disposition. No doubt Serpolis would have an expensive funeral, as that was his final courtesy to his victims.

It was rather clever of the old man, I thought. Perhaps the other parties will stop trying to send me to Georgia. Life seems to be full of ups and downs, but how often it ends in a rapid trip from the magistrate's court, down a food shaft into an ash-cart and at last to the morgue. I flipped a coin to see whether it was right to visit the morgue and view my poor charred and broken body; but, though the coin said "Yes," I said "No." So it was Prince who registered at the Strand, while Kingston became just one more dead collegiate who had failed to make good.

And it was to Prince that the precious package of pictures was delivered, wrapped up in an Oriental carpet, sold me in my room by an Armenian, and how I had always hated these rug men when

they tried to sell me Persians, manufactured by the thousands in New England! Thus, that part of the journey was over. The gangster had come through with his promises, and all I had to do was to make contact with Spartins and show him the pictures. There was no question as to how he would react, probably have me thrown out of his office as a liar.

5. I Meet a Spider

SPARTINS turned out to be a hard man to see. It seemed that he was working on some kind of research and had left orders not to be disturbed till he arrived at a solution of the problem. Evidently, he was one of those one-track minds, like Wilson and Edison. I tried to reach him in every possible way and failed. Then, throwing my letters of introduction into the scrap-basket, I imitated my boyhood detective hero, Taine of San Francisco. It cost a little money to have a bad leak start in his laboratory and more money to be the plumber's helper when that leak was fixed, but at least I was where I could see the old hardshell and force him to look at my pictures.

His laboratory was the dirtiest, most littered, unusual laboratory I had ever seen. The world had dumped every possible kind of insect there, much faster than he and his assistants could assort and give them shelf room. Consequently, every inch of available space was filled to overflowing. Four men were doing their best. The old man was at a desk in the center of the room, one eye glued to a microscope. Tradition said that at times he went two days and nights without leaving his chair.

Did he pay any attention to me when I went over to his table? Or when I shook it and asked him to listen to me? Not at all. He simply distorted his tangled white hair and cried with a shrill voice to his men to come and throw me out. I was just as much in earnest now as he was; so the first man who came to remove me landed on the floor.

"You have to look at these pictures!" I demanded.

He stood up and shook his fist in my face.

"Just at the time when I nearly saw it, after waiting all these hours, you have come and disturbed me!"

He was less than five feet high, stoop-shouldered, deformed, one eye out and three fingers off the left hand. His face was wrinkled and withered. His hair, long and scant, fell uncared for over his beaded black eyes. He looked like a spider.

Spartins had been a man in his day. Not all his life had been spent in a crowded laboratory in London. Everywhere in the world where insects abounded he had lived and studied and suffered. Now, in his maturity, the insects came to him, by the thousands, from everywhere, and he, honored above all men in his specialty, simply sat still and tried to find the answer to problems no one had ever even thought of asking, let alone answering.

Though I towered over him by a foot, there was still something majestic about him that gave me cause for fear. Yet there was nothing to do but hold my ground.

"Look at these pictures!" I repeated.

And I held one in front of him.

He looked at it.

"Africa?" he asked, squinting his one eye, first at me and then at the picture. It was the picture showing the hundreds of little rounded domes.

"America," I replied.

"Queer architecture. Get out of here. Trying to sell me views?"

"No. Look at this one, through the reading-glass."

He looked at it.

"Any more of that kind?"

"A dozen or so."

"Johnson," he cried, "take this trash off my table. Bring me a stronger light and my reading-lenses. Stranger, you look like a dirty plumber, and God knows where you got those pictures and what you want of me, but I'll look at them. Spread them out! Any special sequence to them?"

"No. They all are of the same place, only taken at different times and different heights, from an airplane."

HE STARTED to look at them. I looked at my watch. It was half past nine. The sun was just beginning to penetrate the London fog. At twelve he was still looking at the pictures. At three he called for milk, drank it when it was placed in his hand and kept on looking. At four he selected one of the pictures and ordered an assistant to make an enlargement of it at once. Five brought more milk. At seven he looked at the enlargement, and slowly piled the pictures in careful order, even putting a rubber band around them.

Then he looked at me.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"George Kingston, graduate of Harvard, entomologist."

"Belong to our Society?"

"Yes."

Calling to one of his assistants he whispered orders. The man came back in a few minutes with an index card. Spartins read it.

"There was a George Kingston, answering to your data, but he was killed last week in an airplane wreck."

"I am the man, and I was not killed. I came over from New York to get your opinion of the pictures. You can name your price, and if you want your opinion to be a secret, it will be."

"My first statement, and probably my last, Mr. Kingston, is that these pictures are a lie."

"We had an idea you would say so."

"But there is something more that should be said. You notice I am not asking you for details documenting these pictures. I might ask you why and where and how they came to be taken, but what is the use? There is only one thing to ask, one question to answer. Are these pictures real photographs or have they been retouched in such a way as to make them photographic lies? If they are lies, they are clever; if they are true, they are impossible.

"So, either way we face an impasse. We are so fond of saying that a thing is impossible because we have not seen it ourselves. We are all Doubting Thomases when it comes to scientific facts. We feel that the age of fairy-tales is past, the time for artistic lies at an end. Every statement must be documented, examined, subjected to the scalpel and microscope. We are willing to take nothing for granted. In comes a tramp steamer and the captain and crew say they saw a sea-serpent. It is twice as long as the ship, had a head larger than a barrel and whiskers under a red comb like a rooster. The story is in all the papers. It makes good copy. But does any one believe it? Does a single naturalist credit it? No. We want pictures and the body. We demand the head—comb, whiskers and all.

"Sailors tie their ship to an island. They land on it and fill their casks with water. They pick oranges and bananas. At the end of the week the island slowly submerges and they realize that they have been living on the back of a sea-turtle. When they come back they tell their story

and it lives on, as a tradition. But do we believe it? No. Because we have never seen such a turtle.

"So I am going to tell you that these pictures are clever, damned clever, but they are lies! But I am also going to tell you that if I were fifty instead of seventy, I would find out. That is, I would go there and find out for myself. Don't know how I would do it, and I should have to be very careful, because it looks like a dangerous place; but I would go just the same, because I could not stay away.

"I am over seventy. Lost my eye in Borneo and my fingers in British Guiana, but I have never lost my imagination. Used to tell myself stories when a boy, about Jack and the beanstalk, and just as soon as I could I started to roam the world, finding out the truth of it all.

"You have given me a story. Have not said a word, just shown me a lot of pictures. It is a fairy-story, boy, but at the same time, it is a good one. I would want to find out about it—if I were fifty instead of seventy. Now, tell me about it all."

We went to his house and had supper and actually talked till nearly three the next morning. The man was a storehouse of information; it was a great treat to hear him talk, and the fact that I am alive today is due to the advice he gave me that night. Once he was almost on the point of going into Rose Crater with me, but at the last he almost apologized and begged to be allowed to stay at home. He must have had a premonition of his death, because I saw an account of his demise three days later. Had I come the following week, had I been less persistent, I would never have seen him, and this story would never have been written.

He was little and blind in one eye and maimed, but he was a real scientist. There are some things in my life I am proud of, events I treasure in my memory, and chief among these is my interview with Spartins, entomologist, scientist, and above all very much of a man.

I returned to New York via the Orient and Canada.

6. I Prepare for Murder

AT LAST I was back in the United States, a man without a name and with a rather shady past. Professor Kingston had died in England. I had paid a smuggler a thousand dollars to smuggle me across the Canadian border. With my being back in New York City, with a beard and an alias, it looked as though the time had come for action.

Serpolis and I had a long conference in a fifth-rate hotel up on One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Street. It was November, and we knew that we had to move fast to go into Rose Crater with the other 999 men the first of the next April. The Supreme Court made their selection during February, and the lists were published on the first of March.

"It has to be more than murder," declared the gangster.

"Why?"

"Because only the worst, the most hardened murderers and criminals with the most atrocious crimes against them are selected. Just an ordinary murder won't do. It has to be something that stands out, that will startle the nation. I have it! Judge Holsome is the man to kill!"

"A judge?" I asked, startled.

"Yes, but you need not worry. In the first place, he deserves killing. He has double-crossed more than one worthy gangster, and, worse than that, he has betrayed his oath of office. The second reason why you need not worry is that he is going to be thoroughly dead before

you come into touch with him. I thought I explained that to you. He needs killing about as badly as any man I know of."

"You seem to hate him, Mr. Serpolis."

"Why not? It may seem personal, but he is the one man responsible for putting my daughter in Rose Crater. No use going into that at this time, but I am asking you to believe that he didn't give the child a fair trial."

It did not seem to be the right time to ask him for any details. Anyway, I was too far into it to retreat, and after all, if I were to have the credit of killing a man, it did not make any real difference who it was; so I told him to go ahead and let me have the details whenever he was ready.

Three days later his agent handed me a loaded revolver and showed me how to use it. I was to be up at Seventy-Ninth and Broadway at eleven in the evening. The body would be tossed out near me and I was to run over and start emptying the revolver into it. The idea was that I was to be caught bare-handed, in the act, with several witnesses to testify that they saw me actually firing at the man.

After that it seemed that the law would act fast. It was not very often that a murderer was caught in the act, not every day that a judge was killed. The fact that it was my first offense was not going to be in my favor. The fact that I had ten one-thousand-dollar bills in my pocket when arrested was not going to help any, or that I was to have a vial of cocain in another pocket. Of course, I would lie, but everything and everybody would be against me. Thinking it over, I was rather glad that Professor Kingston was so very, very dead.

THE night before my last day of freedom I had the final conference with Serpolis. All the loose threads had to be gathered together so that there would be a perfect understanding.

"I do not want you to forget anything," he explained. "If you fail, I shall have to admit that the system is smarter than I am. Have you everything arranged for? How about the last dose of the serum?"

"I took it today," I answered. "Of course, there is a question of dose and the length of time it will be protective. Also there is the doubt of specificity. All we had to go by was the pictures. Spartins thought he was able to tell, but at the best it was guesswork. If we had had a colored picture, it would have been easier. It was a fortunate thing I saw Spartins. It looks as though he would have gone in with me if he had lived. He certainly was interested, in the scientific end of it."

"Even though he thought the pictures were faked?"

"Yes. But there was a struggle there between the cold-blooded scientist and the child who believes in dragons and fairy-tales. He did not think it true *but he wanted to believe that it was.*"

"Just what are your plans?"

"Haven't any. I am going in and I think that I am going to come out. That is all."

"I want to make myself clear," explained the gangster. "There is only one reason I am sending you in, only one reason why I sent the others in. I love my daughter and want to know what has happened to her. If I know she is dead, I can spend my last days in peace. It is the uncertainty that is killing me. There is no use of telling you how she was caught, but there is one thing I have to tell you: she was a good girl, and she went in to save me from what she thought was sure death. After she was caught I did everything I could to save her, but Holsome thought he saw a chance to break me, and

he just laughed at me when I asked him to reopen the case."

"I could ask for the details," I assured him, "but I am going to take your word for it—that she was a good girl. Tell me one thing. What did you call her?"

"Always called her Happy, but her right name was Joan."

"That won't be hard to remember," I assured him. "One thing else. Why not go in with me? It would give you no end of a thrill."

"Can't. Don't want to brag, but I am taking care of a lot of wives and children of my gang. They are in the crater, but they were true to me while they were working for me and I promised them I would look after their families."

That made him look like a peculiar criminal.

7. *Murder*

IT WAS damp and unpleasant at Seventy-Ninth and Broadway. Everything, the revolver, the vial of cocain, the ten thousand dollars, made me feel unhappy. I looked at the cheap Ingersoll that was a part of my make-up. Five minutes of eleven. Taxicabs were going past by the hundred. On other corners stood men as dejected and forlorn as I felt. I realized that they were members of Serpolis' gang, witnesses, and perhaps none too comfortable. The traffic cop eyed me closely. Maybe he had been tipped off. I reached in my pocket, took my gun by the handle and prepared for the end.

It came. Absolutely on the minute.

A taxi slid alongside the curb, dropped a body and moved on without a pause. I jumped forward. My gun blazed, the muzzle almost touching the corpse. Bullet after bullet found the target.

I was still firing when the policeman hit me with his night-stick. The next thing I knew I was in jail.

The following day the press of a nation demanded that an example be made of the murderer of a judge. When the time came that a dope fiend could receive ten thousand dollars for a cold-blooded murder like that, it was time for justice to take the bandages off her eyes and act.

There may have been swifter trials in New York, but no one remembered them. In three days I was tried, convicted of murder, sentenced to life imprisonment (the death penalty having been abolished), and a special delegation of prominent New Yorkers was on its way to Washington to urge the Supreme Court to be sure to send me to Rose Crater.

In the only chance I had to speak to the public I admitted my guilt, but I would not tell who had paid me the ten thousand.

So, at last, an entomologist was on his way to Rose Crater.

8. *On my Way to Hell*

OF COURSE, my case attracted a great deal of attention in New York, but, in reality, I was only one of a thousand, and from what I could learn the only one who did not really deserve what was coming to him. In every large city desperate men were waiting for the journey to Rose Crater, a journey which must have seemed to them like the end of everything.

All well enough to say that the men deserved their fate. Fine for preachers, politicians and lawyers to explain that all were enemies of the nation, so many rats who had to be exterminated in some way, so that the country could live. These were bad men, vicious, poisoned, desperate criminals of the underworld, but at the same time, life and liberty were sweet to them and every one was saying good-bye to some one dead to him, a mother, a wife or a child.

And it was a real farewell, no letters from the outer world, no monthly visits from their loved ones, no chance of escape, not even the consolation of knowing that death would be followed by a funeral attended by relatives. This confinement in Rose Crater was worse than death. Just to die was child's play compared with it.

Every one of the thousand men had a different idea of what was beyond Hellgate. Perhaps every idea was wrong. Certainly all of them, except myself, would have gladly faced the lethal chamber or the electric chair rather than walk through the one-way tunnel. Those men had to be watched day and night, after the list was announced, to prevent suicide.

It was the seventh time a thousand men had passed through that gate. Each year one of the thousand had gone in voluntarily because he loved or feared Serpolis. The volunteer this year was going in because he was an entomologist.

Of course, I had to keep on playing the part of a desperate man. That involved an attempt at suicide, which any psychiatrist would have seen was a faked effort.

Serpolis made no attempt to see me. In fact, no one did.

This abjectness attracted the attention of the sob-sisters. Here was a rat so mean, so low, so degenerate that he had no friends, no loved ones, no one interested in him. It was the first time a gangster was so degenerate that some Moll was not in love with him.

How could they know about Joan, the little girl whose nickname was Happy?

The thousand men gathered from every part of the nation. Not a state but had its representatives. They came to Rose Crater, carefully guarded, heavily ironed and without publicity. The Federal Act made it a felony to print any of the details of this annual terror trip through Hellgate to the place of doom. However, everybody knew of it. Probably every one of the thousand had at least a hundred persons who knew him intimately, ten who loved him, ten thousand who had read of his crime and sentence.

Every newspaper on the first of April printed a list of the thousand names, surrounded in long black lines, but without comment.

About this time the entire nation went through a period of depression. Every thinking man and woman felt that in some way he was partly responsible for a condition of life that had finally made such a group punishment necessary.

Thus, finally, as one of the thousand, I arrived at Rose Crater.

THE arrivals were so carefully arranged that on the morning of the first of April the thousand men were ready to pass through Hellgate. The place was surprizingly quiet, considering the number of men assembled, at least two guards for every prisoner.

The Bad Lands of South Dakota are desolate at best. Centuries ago volcanoes, in periods of sickness, had spewed their lava over the land, and never since then had nature been able to so wear down the rock that grass could be grown or roses bloom. Everywhere the mountains rose to die away in deep canyons and rock-strewn plains. Directly in front of us the sides of Rose Crater mounted almost perpendicular toward a leaden sky. The only artificial formation was a semicircular wall, at least sixty feet high. In this wall there was one small gate, and through this gate we were made to march.

First we were stripped, every possible hiding-place for weapons or poison was examined, and then we were given a pair of overalls, and heavy-cleated shoes. Our

names were checked off the list, and in we went.

At last we thousand were inside the wall. I walked over to examine it. It seemed to be made of granite, smooth as glass and sloping inward as it towered. No chance for escape there. It would take a human fly or something better to go up that wall and scale the top. The side of the wall formed by the crater was equally smooth and at least a thousand feet high. The area enclosed was not more than five acres. We were in there and the steel gate was closed on us.

Then, from somewhere, probably loud speakers placed in the wall, the orders came. We listened in silence. Not one of us but wanted to know the worst, or, perhaps, something better.

"Attention. Silence. You are now outside Rose Crater. Between you and the prison is a tunnel through which you must pass. The time of your doing so is for you to decide, but no food will be served you where you are. On the other side of the tunnel you will find a number of small huts, each large enough for two men. You can select your partners. Your food will be served once a day through a chute in the floor of each hut. Printed directions will be found in conspicuous places. No other orders will be given."

The spoken message was repeated twice. Then silence, followed by a sullen under-current of ribald comment.

I walked without speaking through the milling crowd. There was no doubt as to the efficacy of the selecting processes. If ever in the history of mankind a thousand men needed segregation from the rest of humanity, these were the thousand. Every one was there for crimes against society that, collectively, would have made the Devil himself shudder; yet, taken one at a time, these men looked pathetically weak, broken and decidedly inferior, even feeble-minded.

I realized then, as many men before me had realized, that the brilliant criminal mind was rarely caught, that it was usually simply the tools of the leaders who became hopelessly tangled in their conflict with the law.

Anyway, there we were, a thousand of us, foodless, bedless, shelterless in the spring cold of the Bad Lands, with no clothes on except a single garment and no place to go save through the gate. It was black through that hole, and there was some sunshine, at least a little warmth where we were. But if we stayed where we were, we would die, and if we went through Hellgate, we might die anyway. I didn't want to be the first one through, but I thought it worth while to stay near the gate, if for nothing else, to gather some ideas from the brightest of the Lost Battalion.

The men remained away from the black opening in the face of the cliff. Most of them stayed as far away as they could get. One man of all of them came up to the hole and looked in. He was young, clean-shaven, with the form of a Greek god, showing plainly even under the shapeless overall he wore. I liked him, the square set of his jaw, his twinkling blue eyes, his blond curly hair. He looked in and then he looked at me. Something passed between us.

"Hello," he whispered. "What college did you graduate from?"

"What is the grand idea?" I bluffed. "Collegiates don't end up at Rose Crater."

"Is that so? Well, here is one who has, and Yale at that. No use giving my real name, but they still talk about my undergraduate athletic record. I know you have an education. Spotted you from

the first. Know anything about this tunnel?"

"Not a thing, but I am told that it is a one-way street."

"So they tell me. Only prison in the world no one has escaped from. Brag about the fact that if the Count of Monte Cristo had been sent here, he would never have been the Count. Dark as pitch in there, but thousands of men have gone before us; so I guess it is passable. Let's go. Yale leads, as always."

"Go ahead," I laughed, "and Princeton will be right at your heels."

WE WALKED in, felt our way for a hundred feet through blackest darkness, saw a light to our left, turned and entered a long, well-lighted passage. Then the passage was blocked by a hundred pieces of steel meeting each other in a three-inch circle in the middle of the tunnel. Each steel arm had a heavy spring connecting it to the stone wall. The Yale man looked at the contrivance with a curious expression and then suddenly exclaimed,

"I have it, just like an old-fashioned wire rat-trap. There is probably enough give to those springs to enable a man to push his way through, but no one could work his way back."

He jumped up on the blades and started to examine them.

"Just as I thought," he commented, "the other edge of each piece is sharp as a razor and ends in a sharp point. That is something to think about. Once a man starts going through there, he has to keep on. If he starts to come back, he will be cut to pieces. Do you think we ought to tell the boys about this? Or should we let them work it out?"

"Let's sit down and talk this over a minute," I answered. "I don't know why a Yale man is here, and, while I care, it is none of my business. I know why I am here. It is a very definite reason. And I have a very good idea why the other 998 men are here. I think they are the scum of America; if this is a rat-trap, they are in the right place. So, I am not going to be a good fellow, or a Samaritan or a Boy Scout. I am going into the trap, because that is what I came here for. I notice that the lower pieces of metal are very rough and will offer a toe-hold so a man can push his way through. Princeton leads and Yale can do as he pleases, but I would advise him not to try any Big Brother stuff on that bunch milling around outside."

At that, I started to climb up the curving metals, reached the point where I had to lie down, used my head to push the points apart to enlarge the opening, kept kicking with the toes of my heavy shoes, finally got my shoulders through, found a wide polished plank on the other side, kept on going and got by without a cut or a prick. I turned around.

"It's easy," I cried, "but the important thing is to keep on going. There is a board over here to slide out on. Coming?"

"No. I am going back and help the boys through. Some of them would kill themselves on that devilish machine."

"O. K. Good-bye, Yale, I am on my way."

"Bye, Princeton. Oh! How about being my hutmate?"

"Suits me. See you later."

On I went, past other one-way traps, and at last through a revolving door into a light that made me blink. The sun was shining into Rose Crater and was reflected by over a thousand curving glass roofs, scattered over a circle that must have been some miles in diameter. On one side of the wall was a large house, which was

also made of glass, or something that looked like it. All about, the walls of the crater rose sheer, an unbelievable distance. I judged that it was over a mile to the top, and nowhere was a crack offering even a toe-hold.

But it was not the hundreds of little glass huts, the large house, the perpendicular walls, or the peculiar effect of the sunlight coming down the crater that interested me. I knew about the little huts, and I was well acquainted with the geographical and geological features of the crater. Serpolis and I had carefully studied and evaluated every one of the pictures he had, most of which had been taken with telescope lenses.

It was none of these things that interested me. It was something that I should have been prepared for, something that I knew very well but had refused to allow above the threshold of consciousness, something that had to be faced, but, at the same time, took unusual courage to face.

Since Rose Crater had been offered to the United States for use as a penal institution, seven thousand five hundred convicts had entered Heligate and passed through the one-way tunnel. They had come in, and they had stayed in.

But the streets were deserted. I could not see a single person.

The place was as quiet as the grave, as silent as a charnel-house, but it was clean and orderly and there were no bodies, not even one.

The inside opening of the tunnel was perhaps a hundred feet above the floor of the crater. The little huts were laid out in rows with mathematical precision. They were all the same size, and evidently molded out of glass or some kind of transparent quartz, circular at the base, not over ten feet in diameter, and rounded up to end in a small opening, probably for ventilation. Each hut had one door and no windows. There were about a thousand of them; evidently the idea of having two men occupy one hut was an afterthought.

I walked down a street between two rows of huts. The prison was clean of human inhabitants, but otherwise a trifle soiled. Sanitation had evidently been neglected. Fortunately, the atmosphere was very dry, and even the soil, such as it was, was loose and dusty. I walked for about a mile and came to the end of the huts. The large house was at my left, sheltered against the side of the crater. All the open space was dotted with large barrels. I examined one and found that it had a one-inch pipe running into it. The inside of the barrel was sticky. I tasted it by means of my finger and found that it was sugar. The slight scent of sulfur meant real Louisiana cane sirup. But at present the barrel I examined was empty, except for an inch of crystals at the bottom.

Serpolis and I had considered the matter of the barrels and the cane sirup. There was not much we had not considered. It looked as though some of his surmises were true. I tried to remember all of our conversations. So much of his talk had made no impression on me, occupied as I was with the thoughts of becoming a murderer, but now some of it came back to me. Food and supplies had been shipped into Rose Crater before any convicts were sent there. For ten years there had been extensive purchases of —what was it?—Ah! It came to me! As high as a thousand head of beef cattle on the hoof every year. That was it. *And after the convicts came, the beef shipments stopped.*

The blood-chilling horror that awaited the men inside the crater will be told in next month's thrilling chapters of this sensational story.

The Red Knife of Hassan

By SEABURY QUINN

"Look, look—oh, dear God look!" rasped Margaret Ditmas.

A vivid thrill-tale of a weird murder-mystery, and the exploits of the fascinating little French detective, Jules de Grandin

"*MON DIEU,* is it the—what do you call him?—pinch?" asked Jules de Grandin as the traffic policeman's white-rubber mitten rose before us through the driving rain.

"Askin' your pardon, sir, you're a doctor, ain't you?" The officer pointed to the green cross and caduceus of the medical association attached to my radiator.

"Yes, I'm Doctor Trowbridge——"

"Well, can you spare a moment to go out to th' dredge?" the other interrupted. "One o' th' crew's hurt bad, an' while they're waitin' for th' amb'lance it might help if——"

"But certainly, assuredly; of course," de Grandin answered for me. "Lead the way, *mon brave,* we follow."

The grimy, oil-soaked launch which acted as the harbor dredge's tender was waiting at the pier, and within five minutes we were on the squat, ungainly craft

which gnawed unsurfeited at the ever-shifting bottom of the bay. The injured man, an assistant in the fire room, was suffering intensely, for an unattached steel cable had swung against him as he crossed the deck, smashing the tibia and fibula of his left leg in a green-stick fracture.

"*Non*, there is little we can do here," said the Frenchman as we finished our examination. "We have no proper fracture box, nor any instruments for cutting through the skin in order to secure the splintered bone, but we can ease his pain. Will you prepare the hypo, good Friend Trowbridge? I would suggest two grains of morphine; he suffers most intensely, and a smaller dose would scarcely help him."

Buttoned to the chin in oilskins and swearing like a pirate, the ambulance surgeon came out in the launch as we completed our administration of the anodyne, and rough but willing hands placed the injured man in the boat which bumped its prow against the dredge's side. Sheltered in the doorway of the engine room, we watched the great dredge at its work while we awaited the return trip of the launch. Like some voracious monster diving for its prey the great clam-shell scoop plunged from the tip of the forty-foot boom into the rain-beaten waters of the bay, disappeared amid a ring of oily bubbles, then emerged with water streaming from between its iron teeth, gaped like a yawning hippopotamus, and dropped a ton or more of sand and silt and sediment into the waiting barge.

"Yes, sir, four times a minute, regular as clockwork, she fishes up a mouthful for us," the engineer informed us proudly. "At this rate we'll have this stretch o' channel all cleared out by—God a'mighty, what's that?"

Horribly reminiscent of an oyster impaled upon a fork it hung, feet gripped between the dredge's iron fangs, flaccid arms dangling pendulously, the nude and decomposing body of a woman.

"Easy, Jake, let her down easy!" cried the engineer to the man at the cable-drum. "Don't spring the scoop—we don't want 'er buried in that muck.

"Coming, Doctor?" he cast the question at us impersonally as he jerked the collar of his slicker up about his throat and dashed across the deck through the slanting sheets of winter rain.

"But certainly, of course we come," de Grandin answered as he followed close upon the other's heels, clambered across the rail and let himself almost waist-deep into the ooze which filled the mud-scow's hold. More cautiously, I followed; and as the cable man, with an art which was surprizing, lowered the great iron shell, released the gripping metal teeth and let the body slide down gently in the mire, I bent beside the little Frenchman to examine the weird salvage.

"*Non*, we can not see her here," complained de Grandin irritably. "Lift her up, my friends, gently, carefully—so. Now, then, over to the deck, beneath the shelter of the engine-house. Lights, *pour l'amour de Dieu*, shine the light upon us, if you please!"

A big reflector-lamp was quickly plugged into a light-terminal, and in its sun-bright glare we bent to our examination. There was an area of greenish-gray about the face and throat, extending through the pectoral region and especially marked at the axillæ, but very little swelling of either abdomen or mammæ. As I lifted one of the dead hands I saw the palmar skin was deeply etched with wrinkles and slightly sodden in appearance. When de Grandin turned the body over we saw an area of purplish stain upon the dorsal section, but the shoulder-

blades, the buttocks, backs of the thighs, calves and heels were anemic-white in startling contrast.

"Drowned, of course?" the engineer asked jerkily with the layman's weak attempt at nonchalance before the unmasked face of death.

"No, *non;* by no means," returned the Frenchman shortly. "Observe him, if you please, *le fil de fer,* the—how do you say him?—wire." A slender, well manicured forefinger pointed to the slightly bloated throat just above the level of the larynx. I had to look a second time before I saw it, for the softened, sodden flesh had swollen up around it, but as his finger pointed steadily I saw, and as I realized the implication of the thing, went sick with shock. About the throat a length of picture-wire had been wound and rewound, its ends at last spliced tightly in a knot, so there could have been no slipping of the ligature.

"Strangulation!" I exclaimed in horror.

"Précisément; la garrotte, the work of the *apaches,* my friends, and very well and thoroughly they did it, too. Had it not been for the dredge she might have lain upon the bottom of the bay for months and no one been the wiser. Observe, the coldness of the water has retarded putrefaction, and undoubtlessly she was weighed down, but the iron teeth broke off the weights. One might suppose that——"

"What's that on the left cheek?" I interrupted. "Would you say it was a birthmark, or——"

The Frenchman drew a pocket lens from his waistcoat, held it at varying distances from the dead girl's face, and squinted through it critically. *"Grand Dieu,* a birthmark, a putrefactive stain? *Non!"* he cried excitedly. "Look, Friend Trowbridge, look and see for yourself. What is your opinion?"

I took the magnifying-glass and focused it till the blister-marked and scuffing skin enlarged in texture underneath my gaze, and then I saw, rising up from the discolored epidermis like a coat-of-arms emblazoned on a banner, the outline of a scar shaped something like a crescent standing on end, not marked upon, but deeply pressed into the flesh of the left cheek.

"H'm, no, it's not a natural mark," I commented. "Looks almost like a second degree burn or——"

"It *is* a second degree burn, by blue—a brand!" the little Frenchman broke in sharply. "And there is a line of blister round it, showing that it was made on living skin. *Parbleu,* I damn think we have work to do, Friend Trowbridge!

"Call the tender, if you will, *Monsieur,"* he turned to the chief engineer. "We must notify the coroner, then see that an autopsy is made. This is a very evil business, *mes amis,* for that poor one was branded, strangled, stripped and thrown into the bay."

As we stepped into the launch which plied between the dredge and piers he added grimly: "Someone sits in the electric chair for this night's business, my friend."

CORONER MARTIN, Detective Sergeant Jeremiah Costello, Jules de Grandin and I faced each other in the coroner's private office. "The necropsy bears out my diagnosis perfectly, *Messieurs,"* the little Frenchman told us as he helped himself to another glass of brandy from Mr. Martin's desk-cellarette. "There was no trace of water in the lungs, showing that death could not have come from drowning, and even though dissolution had advanced, fractures of the larynx and the rings of the trachea were obvious, showing that death had come from

strangulation. Taking the temperature of the water into consideration, we may say with fair assurance that the state of putrefaction places her murder at about two weeks ago. Unfortunately the face is too much disfigured to help us with identification, but——"

"How about that scar?" I interjected.

"*Précisément*, how of it?" he rejoined. "Observe it, if you will." Unfastening a paper parcel he held out a little square of parchment-like substance stretched tightly on a wire hoop. "I took the liberty of clipping away the scarified skin and impregnating it with formaldehyde," he explained. "The scar which was so indistinct when viewed upon her face may easily be studied now. What do you make of it, Friend Trowbridge?"

I took the little drumhead of skin and held it underneath the light. The mark was not a crescent, as I had at first supposed, but rather a silhouette of a hiltless dagger with an exaggeratedly curved blade. "A knife?" I hazarded.

"*Précisément*, and that suggests——"

"You mean it might have been a sort of ritual murder?"

"It looks that way, my friend."

"Sure," Costello broke in, "I've heard about them things—ran into one of 'em, onct, meself. A dago case. This here now felly'd belonged to one o' them secret societies, an' tried to take a powder on 'em, or sumpin, an' they give 'im th' *sforza*, I think they called it; th' death o' th' seventy cuts. Doctor de Grandin, sor, he were more like a piece o' hamburger steak than annything human when they'd finished wid 'im. Are ye afther thinkin' this pore dame wuz mixed up in sumpin like that?"

"Something like that," the Frenchman echoed; then:

"Will you consult the files of the Missing Persons Bureau, Sergeant, and ascertain if any young woman approximately the size of this one was reported missing in the last month? That may help us to identify her."

But the check-up proved useless. No record of a girl of five feet three, weighing a hundred and ten pounds, was in the missing persons file at headquarters, nor did communication with New York, Newark and Jersey City help us. Mr. Martin, as the keeper of the city mortuary, took charge of the body and buried it in an unmarked grave in the public plot of Rosevale Cemetery, the only record of its disposition being: "Mary Doe, Plot D, Sec. 54, West Range 1458."

Costello went about his duties of pursuing evil-doers with his customary Celtic efficiency, and dismissed the incident from his mind. I reverted to my practise, and thought but seldom of the poor maimed body; but Jules de Grandin did not forget. Several times at dinner I caught him staring sightlessly before him, neglecting the rare tidbits which Nora McGinnis, my highly gifted cook, prepared especially for him. "What's the matter, old chap?" I asked him one night when he seemed especially distrait.

He shook his head as though to clear his thoughts, and: "*Ah bah*," he answered in annoyance, "there is a black dog running through my brain. That *Mademoiselle l'Inconnue*, the poor nameless one whom we saw fished up from the bay, her blood calls out to me for vengeance."

IT WAS a merry, though decidedly exclusive party Colonel Hilliston entertained at his big house down by Raritan. Why de Grandin had been so set on coming I had no idea, but from the moment he learned that Arbuthnot Hilliston, world traveler, lecturer and explorer, had returned from the Near East, he had given me no peace until I renewed old

acquaintance with the colonel, and obtained our invitation as a consequence. A hundred years and more ago some ambitious shipmaster had built this house, and built it solidly as the ships he sailed. Generations had gone by, the old blood thinned and finally trickled out; then Hilliston, weary of globe-trotting, had purchased the old place, rebuilt and modernized it, then with the restlessness of the born traveler had used it more as *pied-à-terre* than home, coming back to it only in the intervals between five-thousand-mile-long jaunts to write his books, prepare his lectures and foregather with his friends a little while.

"You've known Colonel Hilliston long, Doctor Trowbridge?" asked my dinner partner, a tall and more than ordinarily interesting brunette whose name, as I had caught it in the rite of presentation, was Margaret Ditmas.

"Not very, I'm afraid," I answered. "I knew his parents better. They were patients of mine when they lived in Harrisonville, and I attended Arbuthnot for the customary children's ailments, mumps and measles, chickenpox and whooping-cough, you know, but since he's been grown up and famous——"

"Did he ever strike you as a nervous child, or one likely to develop nerves?" she interrupted, and her large and rather expressionless eyes were unveiled suddenly by an odd raising of their upper lids.

"No-o, I can't say he did," I told her. "Just a normal boy, I'd say, rather fond of finding out the reason why for everything he saw, but scarcely nervous. Why do you ask?"

"Colonel Hilliston's afraid of something—terrified."

I glanced along the table with its priceless banquet cloth of Philippine embroidery, its gleaming silver and big, flat bouquets of winter roses, till I saw our host's face in the zone of light which streamed from two tall candelabra. Plentiful dark hair, brushed sleekly back and growing low about the ears, framed a rather lean and handsome face, bronzed as a sailor's and with fine sun-lines about the eyes, a narrow, black mustache and strong, white teeth. A forceful, energetic face, this long-chinned countenance, hardly the face of a man who could be frightened, much less terrified. "What makes you think that Arbuthnot's developed nerves?" I asked.

"You see those doors?" she queried, nodding toward the triple French windows leading to the brick-paved terrace which skirted the seaward side of the house.

"Well?" I nodded, smiling.

"Their panes are set in wood, aren't they?"

"Apparently; but why——"

"They are, but every wooden setting has a steel bar reinforcing it, and the glass is 'burglar glass'—reinforced with wire, you know. So is every window in the house, and the doors and windows are all secured with combination locks and chains, while the outside doors are sheathed in steel. Besides, there's something in his manner; he's jumpy, seems almost listening for something, and acts as though he were about to turn round and look behind him every moment or so."

She was so serious and secretive about it all that I smiled despite myself. "And does he turn round?" I asked.

"No. I think he's like that man in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner:*

> "Like one that on a lonesome road
> Doth walk in fear and dread,
> And having once turned round, walks on,
> And turns no more his head,
> Because he knows a frightful fiend
> Doth close behind him tread."

"My dear young lady!" I protested, but

Jules de Grandin's voice cut through my words as he spoke jocularly to our host:

"And did you scale the Mount of Evil in Syria, *Monsieur le Colonel?*" he inquired. "The mountain where the ancient bad one dwelt, and sent his minions out to harry those who would not pay him tribute? You know, the Sheik Al-je-bal they called him in the ancient days, and he was head of the *baschisch*-eaters who for two long centuries terrified the world——"

Something flickered momentarily in our host's deep-set eyes, something which if it were not fear seemed very like it to me as I watched. "Nonsense!" he broke in almost roughly. "That's all damned poppycock, de Grandin. Those Assassins were just a lot of ordinary mountain bandits, such as Europe and the Near East swarmed with in those days. All this talk of their mysterious power is legendary, just as half the stories of Robin Hood—or Al Capone, for that matter—are the purest fiction." He gazed around the table for a moment, then nodded to the butler, a small, dark man with olive skin and big, Semitic features.

"Coffee is served in the drawing-room, please," announced this functionary, deftly bringing the meal to a close.

WE TROOPED into the big parlor, and I caught my breath in admiration of the place. The beauty of that room was a sort of mad, irrational loveliness, a kind of orderly arrangement of discordant elements which resulted in perfected harmony. A buhl table out of India, Fifteenth Century Italian chairs, Flemish oak, ponderous as forged iron and beautiful as carven marble, a Chinese cabinet which must have been worth its weight in solid gold, pottery, shawls and hangings from the near and farther East, carved jade, rugs so thick and soft it seemed as though the floor were strewn with desert sand—a very art-museum of a place it was. Thick Turkish coffee and great squares of halwa were handed round by the stoop-shouldered butler, and presently long cigarettes, almost the size of a cigar, were lighted, and I caught the faint, elusive perfume of ambergris as the smoke-wreaths spiraled upward in the dim light sifting through the perforated bronze shades of the lamps.

"Ambergris — for passion," quoted Margaret Ditmas as she lolled beside me on the divan with a cat-like grace of utter relaxation. "You've heard the Easterners believe that, Doctor Trowbridge?"

I turned and studied her. Her hair was very black and glossy, and she wore it smoothly parted and drawn low above her ears. Her eyes were large, dark, queerly unmoving under thin-arched brows. Her mouth was wide, thin-lipped, very red, and her teeth were small and white. Beneath the hem of her black-satin gown there showed an inch or so of gray-silk stocking, and underneath the meshes of the silk there shone a gleam of platinum where a thread-thin anklet encircled her slim leg. I sensed a hard shell over her almost feline suppleness, as though she wore defensive armor against the world. "Where does she fit in?" I asked myself. "And why should she be so attentive to a bald, bewhiskered medical practitioner when there are young and handsome men around? Our host, for instance——"

Colonel Hilliston's voice broke through my ruminations. "Anybody like to play roulette?" he asked. "I've got a set-up here, so if you wish——"

A chorus of enthusiastic assent drowned out his invitation, and in a minute a roulette wheel and cloth were spread across the beautiful buhl table, and Hilliston took his place as croupier. Plaques were placed upon the numbered squares,

and: *"Le jeu est fait, messieurs et dames, rien ne va plus,"* he sang out nasally.

The little ball clicked round the spinning wheel, and: *"Vingt-deux, noir, messieurs et dames——"* he chanted.

The play was rather high. My American conscience and Scottish ancestry revolted at the sums I lost, but my losses were as nothing beside those of Miss Ditmas. She hung in breathless interest above the table, her dark eyes dilated, her small, white teeth clamped sharply on her carmine lower lip.

"Le jeu est fait, messieurs et dames—what the devil?" Colonel Hilliston broke off his nasal chant as the lights winked out and the room was drenched in sudden, utter, blinding darkness.

"Nejib, Nejib—lights!" It seemed to me there was a thin, hysterical quality in Hilliston's voice as he called the butler.

A soft hand clasped on mine with a grip so strong it startled me, and Miss Ditmas' low-breathed whisper fluttered in my ear. "Doctor Trowbridge, I—I'm afraid *it got in!*"

There was a gentle whistling sound and a gentle draft of air swept on my face, as though an open hand had fanned swiftly past my features, and I thought I heard someone move past me in the dark and stumble clumsily against the roulette table.

"Lights, 'illiston *effendi?*" murmured the butler, appearing at the doorway with a silver candelabrum in each hand.

No answer came from Colonel Hilliston, and the fellow moved silently across the room, the aura of luminance from his burning tapers preceding and surrounding him.

"Look, look—oh, dear God, *look!*" rasped Margaret Ditmas in a choking whisper, then broke off in a wail of mortal terror. It was a terrifying sound, a little, breathless squeak of mortal fear that thinned into a sick, shrill wail of horror. It seemed to hang and linger in the air like the tintinnabulation of a softly beaten gong, until at last I did not know if I still heard it or only thought I did—and would go on thinking that I heard that dreadful, shrilling cry of agonizing panic ever after.

And well she might cry out, for in the center of the roulette table stood the head of Colonel Hilliston. It stood there upright on its severed neck, white eyeballs glaring at us in the flickering candlelight, mouth gaping open as though to frame a cry.

Beneath the table lay the headless trunk, half sprawled, half crouched, one hand extended on the Turkey carpet, the other clasped about the table-leg, as though it sought to drag the body upward to the missing head. Blood was gushing from the severed jugulars and carotids, blood stained and soaked the carpet at our feet and splashed the tip of Jules de Grandin's patent-leather evening pump, and, amazingly, a tiny drop of blood hung like a jewel from the crystal prisms of the ceiling chandelier which swung above the table whence the head stared at us with a sort of silent accusation.

"BUT, my dear man!" Captain Chenevert of the state constabulary, who had come dashing from the Keyport barracks with two troopers in answer to de Grandin's call, hooked his thumb beneath his Sam Browne belt and gazed at us in turn with something like the look he might have given to a romancing child. "You tell me you were all assembled in the drawing-room when suddenly the lights went out and when that heathen butler—what's his dam' name? Nejib?—came in with candles, there was Hilliston without his head? Absurd! Preposterous!"

"Parbleu, you are informing us?" de

Grandin answered with elaborate sarcasm. "Nothing more utterly bizarre was ever fished up from the vapors of an opium-smoker's dream—but there it is. Including Doctor Trowbridge and myself and the late Colonel Hilliston, there were eight persons in that room. You have heard the evidence of seven, while the eighth bears mute but eloquent testimony of the murder. We are all agreed upon what happened: There is light, there is sudden darkness, then there is light again —and there is Colonel Hilliston without his head. Name of a devil, it is crazy; it is impossible; it does not make sense, but there it is. *Voilà tout!*"

"See here, you fellows," I put in; "Maybe this may have some bearing on the case, though I don't see how." Then, briefly, I told them of my conversation with Miss Ditmas at the table, her handclasp in the dark and her terrified declaration: "I'm afraid *it got in!*"

"By George, that is interesting; we'll have her in again," said Captain Chenevert; but:

"*Non,* not yet; one little moment, if you please," objected Jules de Grandin. "Me, I have what you call the hunch."

Crossing to the secrétaire, he tore a sheet of note-paper across, then with a match sopped up a little drying blood from the sodden carpet and traced the silhouette of a curved, sharp-pointed dagger on the paper. "Delay your summons for a little while, if you will be so kind," he urged, waving the paper back and forth to hasten drying. "Now, call her in, if you will."

He laid the gruesome picture face-downward on the table beside the objects taken from the dead man's pockets, and lit a cigarette as a trooper ushered Margaret Ditmas in.

"*Mademoiselle,*" he began as she looked at us inquiringly, "we have made an inventory of *Monsieur le Colonel's* effects, the little things he carried in his pockets. Perhaps you can identify them. Here are his keys: you recognize them? No?"

"No," she replied, scarcely glancing at the thin gold chain with its appended key-ring.

A little wad of crumpled banknotes followed, a cigarette lighter, knife, card case, cigarette case, and always, "No, I do not recognize it," she returned as each was shown to her.

Then: "Last of all, we came on this," de Grandin told her. "A strange thing, surely, for a gentleman to have," he turned the sheet of writing-paper with its scarlet dagger up, and held it toward her.

Her face went ghastly at the sight. "You—you found *that* on him?" she exclaimed. "The Red Knife of Has——"

Like a football player tackling an opponent, de Grandin launched himself upon her, grasping her about the knees and hurling her backward several feet before they fell together in a heap upon the floor. And not a fraction of a second had he been too soon, for even as he threw her back, the ceiling chandelier dropped downward like a striking snake, there was a gleam of steel and the *click* of closing metal jaws; then up the fixture leapt again and was once more the harmless glass-hung thing which it had been before.

"*Pardonnez-moi, Mademoiselle,* I did forget that you were standing where the colonel stood," de Grandin told Miss Ditmas as he helped her to her feet. "I hope you are not hurt—but if you are, your injury is slighter than it would have been had I not acted roughly."

"Shaunnessy, Milton!" shouted Chenevert. "Did anybody move?"

"Sir?" asked Trooper Shaunnessy. "Did the captain call?"

"I'll tell the cock-eyed world he did," the captain answered angrily. "You were on guard in the library, weren't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did anybody leave the room?"

"No, sir."

"Anybody get up, press a button or lean against the wall, or anything like that?"

"No, sir. Everyone was seated. No one moved until you called."

"All right. How about you, Milton?"

"Sir?"

"You were in the hall outside this room. See anybody?"

"No, sir; not a soul."

"Bring that butler to me, and bring him *pronto.*"

A moment later Trooper Milton came back with the butler, who, arrayed in rubber apron, his sleeves rolled to the elbows, had obviously been engaged in the matter-of-fact occupation of washing the silver when summoned.

"Where were you just now?" the captain asked.

"In the pantry, please," the other answered. "Me, I always wash the silver after dinner. The kitchen maids the dishes wash when they come in the morning."

"Humph; you were the only one of the help here tonight?"

"Tonight and every night, please. The cook, the chamber maids, the kitchen girls, they all go home at sundown. Only I remain to serve the dinner and to close the house at night. Me, I sleep here."

"Know the combinations of those door- and window-locks?"

"No, please. 'illiston *effendi,* he knows them only. You shut them so—they lock. But only he can open them."

"U'm; how long have these locks been here?"

"I not knowing, Captain *effendi.* I come here from Damascus with Colonel 'illiston when he come here. He engage to hire me there. I veree good butler and valet, me; serve in the finest English families, and——"

"All right; we'll look into your references later. What are you, an Arab or a Turk or——"

"Captain *effendi!*" the butler's protest was instinct with injured pride. "Me, I am Armenian. I very good Christian, me, I go to Christian school at——"

"All right, go back to the pantry now, and see you don't leave it unless you have permission."

"Hearing and obeying," replied the other, and turned with a deep bow.

"Well, I'll be a monkey's uncle," Captain Chenevert declared. "I sure will. This dam' case gets tougher by the minute. Now we know how Hilliston was killed, but who the devil worked that guillotine, and who installed it, and—say, Doctor de Grandin, d'ye suppose——"

A crash of breaking crockery, a wild, despairing scream and the noise of heavy objects crashing into one another drowned his question out.

"It's in th' pantry!" Trooper Milton shouted and raced down the long hall with the captain, de Grandin and me at his heels.

"Can't budge th' door!" he grunted as we stopped before the pantry entrance. "Seems like something's wedged against it——"

"Here, let me help," Chenevert cut in, and together they threw their shoulders against the white-enameled door.

It gave slowly, inch by stubborn inch, but at last they forced it back enough to let them in.

The pantry was a ruin. Across the

door a heavy table had been pushed, the china closet had been overturned, and scattered on the white-tiled floor were bits of Colonel Hilliston's choice silverware. Also upon the tiles there spread a great red stain, growing fainter and more faint as it approached the window, which, to our surprize, was open.

"Good Lord," the captain muttered, "they—whoever it was got Hilliston with that infernal beheading-machine — got that poor Armenian, too! Run outside, Milton; see if you can find any trace of the body."

De Grandin stooped and scooped a little of the blood from the floor into a bit of envelope he drew from his pocket; then, surprizingly, he fell to examining the pantry walls, completely ignoring the blood train leading to the window.

"Not a chanst o' findin' anything out there, sir," Trooper Milton reported. "It's rainin' cats an' dogs, and any trail they mighta left when they drug 'im away's been washed completely out."

"I was afraid of that," Chenevert responded with a nod. "What's next, Doctor de Grandin?"

"Why, I think we might as well go home," the little Frenchman answered. "You have the name and address of every person present; besides, I am quite sure the murderer has gone. I have made memoranda of some things you might investigate tomorrow, and if you'll kindly give them your attention we shall see each other here tomorrow afternoon. Possibly we shall know more by then."

"O. K., sir. How about that Ditmas dame? Think we'd better give her another going over? She's hiding something, and unless I miss my guess, she knows plenty."

The Frenchman pursed his lips and raised his shoulders in the faint suspicion of a shrug. "I do not think that I would question her tonight," he answered. "Her nerves are badly out of tune, and she might easily become hysterical. Tomorrow evening, I think, we may learn something of real value from her."

"O. K.," the other repeated. "We'll do whatever you say, but I'd put her on the griddle *now* if it were left to me. See you about three o'clock tomorrow? Right-o."

"WELL, I checked up on those matters, sir," the captain told de Grandin when we met in the Hilliston drawing-room next afternoon. "It seems the work was done by a Greek or Armenian, or some kind of Syrian named Bogos; he installed the electrical fixtures, and, of course, this chandelier, along with all the other paraphernalia——"

"And how much more? one wonders," de Grandin interjected in a whisper.

"What's that?"

"Nothing of importance. You were saying——"

"This Bogos chap put in all the fixtures on Colonel Hilliston's orders, written from abroad, but when we went to Harrisonville to interview him, he'd skipped."

"Decamped?"

"Evaporated. Left with no forwarding address, you might say. Indeed, when we got to running over his activities, it appears that Hilliston's was the only job he ever did, and he left as soon as it was finished."

"U'm? This is of interest."

"You bet your neck it is. Looks as though this Bogos guy—his name shoulda been spelled 'bogus'—installed a lot of stuff not in Hilliston's specifications. What d'ye think?"

"I think it very likely," returned the Frenchman. "Now, if your men are ready, let us inspect Exhibit A of the machinery of murder."

With hammer and cold chisel two mechanics attacked the frescoed ceiling of the drawing-room, twenty minutes' work bringing the diabolical device to light. Concealed behind the innocent-looking mask of a prism-hung chandelier was a pair of strong steel jaws, razor-sharp, and working on oil-bathed bearings. How it was actuated there was no means of telling without tearing down the entire wall and ceiling of the room, but a single glance was sufficient to tell us that when the thing was dropped and the jaws sprung, it was powerful enough to bite through anything less resistant than a bar of iron. Measuring the cable on which it operated, we determined that it was designed to fall and gnash its metal jaws at a height of five feet from the floor.

"Colonel Hilliston was six feet one," Chenevert commented. "Allowing for an inch or so of neck, it was just made to slice his head off right below the chin. And say, wasn't that Ditmas girl lucky when you barged into her? The thing woulda bitten the top right off her head."

He took a turn across the room; then: "She was about to spill something when it started to drop on her, too," he added. "Something about some sort o' knife when you showed her that picture you'd made. Now, how the devil was it timed so nicely, and who worked it?"

"Let us inspect the butler's pantry," answered Jules de Grandin irrelevantly.

"Last night," he told us as we halted in the room from which the butler had been taken, "I made an examination of these walls while you were looking at the blood stains on the floor. Do you observe that clock?" He pointed to a small electrical chronometer set in the wall.

"Yeah, I see it. What about it?"

"Look closely at it, *Monsieur le Capitaine*. Does not it seem unusual?"

Chenevert examined the timepiece from several angles, tapped it tentatively with his forefinger, finally compared it with his watch. "It's half a minute fast, that's all I see," he answered.

"*Ah bah*, you are like the idols of the heathen who having eyes see not!" de Grandin told him irritably. "See how it has been fastened to the wall? Screwed? *Non*. Cemented? Again *non*. Riveted? *Mais non*—it hangs on hinges. Now see." With a quick jerk he drew the timepiece forward like a door, disclosing a small cavity beneath it. In this there hung a little disk of hard black rubber, like a telephone lineman's ear-piece, and in the very center of the hole there was a circular lens, shaded by an apron of black metal.

"Look into it," he ordered, and hold the 'phone against your ear."

I gazed across the captain's shoulder as de Grandin left the pantry. In a moment I beheld him, as though seen through the large end of a pair of opera glasses, standing by the table where Hilliston had met his death.

"It is a kind of periscope," he told us as he re-entered the pantry. "Could you hear me when I spoke to you?"

"Yes, distinctly," answered Chenevert. "You said, 'Do not press the button at the bottom, if you please.' "

"*Exactement*. Now do you and good Friend Trowbridge go into the drawing-room and see what happens."

Obediently we walked to the parlor, and as Chenevert hailed, "All right, Doctor," we heard a sharp and wasp-like buzzing in the ceiling whence the men had moved the hidden guillotine.

"It is as simple as the alphabet when once one masters it," the Frenchman told us. "One in this ninety-times-accursed pantry sees what happens in the drawing-room. Also, he hears the conversation there. Now, if you look there by that

china closet, you will see a little metal door. What does it hide?"

"I'll bite," said Chenevert.

"A fuse-box, by blue! You see? Standing here, before this spy-hole, one can reach out and disconnect the lighting-wires from the drawing-room, from that whole section of the house, indeed, at a single motion. Then, when darkness falls upon the parlor, one does but press this button, and *pouf!* someone has his head decapitated with neatness and dispatch. Not only that, by the motion of the guillotine, the head is placed upon the table for all to look at when the lights go on again. Ingenious; ingenious as the schemes of Satan, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

"Why, then, that's what caused the little breath of air I felt against my face," I told him. "It was the guillotine dropping within an inch or so of me. Great heavens——"

"*Ah bah,* an inch was quite enough to spell the difference between life and death for you, my friend," he told me with a grin.

"But who the devil operated it?" Chenevert demanded. "Of course, the butler might have been back here when Hilliston was killed, but they bumped him off, too; so——"

"You are positively sure of that?" de Grandin interrupted.

"Well, nothing's sure but death and taxes, but when we heard him yell, then found this place all smeared with blood——"

"The liquid which you found upon the floor, by example?"

"Yeah, sure; what else?"

"Oh, I thought perhaps you might have found some blood," the little Frenchman answered with an elfin grin. "Last night I took precaution to soak some of that liquid into a piece of paper. Today I analyzed him. He is an exceptionally fine specimen of—red ink, *mon Capitaine.*"

"Well, I'll be damned!"

"One hopes sincerely otherwise, though undoubtlessly you would lend a touch of *savoir faire* to hell, my friend."

"So that butler guy did it, after all! H'm. Now, how're we going to put the finger on him? That Ditmas girl——"

"*Précisément, mon Capitaine.* You have said it."

"Eh? Said what?"

"The pretty Mademoiselle Ditmas, she shall be our stalking-horse."

"*TIENS,* the threads begin to join together in a single cord," he told us as we drove toward Harrisonville.

"I can't see it," I responded. "It seems the most mixed-up hodgepodge I ever heard of. Nothing seems related to anything else, and——"

"You have wrong, my friend," he contradicted. "The relationship is clear, and growing clearer every minute. "Consider——" he checked the items off upon his fanned-out fingers: "Last month we saw a poor dead girl fished up from the bay. Upon her cheek was burned the picture of a knife. Me, I do not know why this should be, but that picture is not merely the representation of a dagger, it is a dagger of one specific kind. The simplest form of dagger-picture is a cross, two straight lines crossing at right angles. Not this one, though. But no, certainly not. It is the carefully prepared picture of a Tripolitan throwing-knife—which may also be conveniently used as a hand-weapon.

" 'What should such a picture be doing burned on an American young lady's cheek?' I want to know. This business smells strongly of the East, even to the manner of her killing. Then *zut!* through the so thick head of Jules de Grandin

comes a thought. I was in the Service of Intelligence in the War, my friends; besides I have done some service for the *Sûreté*, and I have friends around the world. One of them, serving with our forces in Syria, wrote me but recently of a revival of that sect once called *les Assassins*—the almost mythical but very potent followers of Hassan ibn Sabbah, who from their fortress at Aleppo had terrorized two continents for near three hundred years. Not like a plague, but rather like an epidemic sickness the chapters of this most abominable sect were springing up, now here, now there, throughout the country near Damascus, even as far as Jerusalem and Bagdad. The French had met them with repressive measures, and, believe me, Frenchmen entertain no silly sentimental notions of conciliating native prejudice where law and order are involved. However, we digress.

"The blood-red dagger, exactly like the one burned on that poor girl's face, was the official badge of Hassan's minions in the days of old. 'Now, can it be——' I ask me, and even as I ask, along comes Colonel Hilliston, the soldier and explorer, the *beau sabreur* among the travelers, and providentially, he is back from the Near East. 'This one will surely know of what is which,' I tell me confidently. 'He will have surely poked beneath the rubbish-heaps of gossip and found the truth. He is a learned man, a fearless man; best of all, he is a curious and most inquisitive man.'

"And so I plague my good Friend Trowbridge till he secures an invitation for us to the colonel's house, and while we all make merry at a most exquisite meal I bring the subject of the Haunted Mountain of the hashish-eaters up; I ask our host if he, by any happy chance, has scaled it for a look around. And does he tell me that he has? Damn no. He shies away from such talk as a nervous horse goes dancing when a piece of paper blows across the road. Ah, but Jules de Grandin is no simpleton. Not he! He can read the signs in people's faces as he reads the print upon the page. And what does he see in the face of Colonel Hilliston? What does he see, I ask it?" He paused dramatically; then:

"Fear!" he said.

"Yes, *mes amis*, most certainly, it was fear I saw shine in his eyes, a fear that might be classified as terror; the terror of the hunted deer when, thinking herself safely hid, she hears the baying of the hounds upon her trail. Yes, certainly.

"*Et puis*—and then? Meantime my good Friend Trowbridge, with a manner highly unbecoming to his eminent respectability, has become most friendly with a pretty little lady who, if ever woman had it, contains a large-sized portion of the devil in her make-up. But do they talk of moonlight kisses and the scent of twice-crushed rose leaves in a lady's flowing hair, or tender nothings spoken underneath the twinkling stars? Damn no, they do entirely otherwise. They talk of Colonel Hilliston and of something which he fears, of the iron reinforcements of his doors and windows, of the locks and bars and bolts which make his house secure. Secure against whom—or what? What is the terror which pursues him night and day?

"And then, when all the lights go out, and we are plunged in darkness deeper than the blackness of the devil's lowest cellar, what does this pretty lady say to Doctor Trowbridge? 'I'm afraid *it got in!*'

"And next we see *Monsieur le Colonel* wholly headless, lying on the floor of his own house; yet no one knows who struck him down, or how, or why.

" 'Oh, do they not, indeed? We shall inquire as to that,' I tell me when I am in-

formed of Miss Ditmas' conversation, and so I make a picture of a dagger. Not *any* dagger, but the kind of dagger which was burned upon the dead girl's face. And when I show it to Miss Ditmas and tell her we have found it on the colonel's body, what does she say? *Cordieu,* she starts to say it is the Red Knife of Hassan, but she does not finish saying it, for from the ceiling falls the guillotine which almost shears her head away, and thereafter she is speechless as an oyster.

"*Tiens,* we are gathering up the threads, my friends. This Mademoiselle Ditmas, Colonel Hilliston and the dead girl in the bay, they are three corners of a square."

"And the fourth?" I asked.

"Is Nejib, Colonel Hilliston's ex-butler."

"But he's an Armenian, a Christian," Captain Chenevert objected. "Those Assassins you're telling of are Turks or Arabs, or something like that, aren't they?"

"Can you distinguish between a Japanese and Filipino?" de Grandin countered.

"Eh?"

"*Précisément.* They look alike; it would be easy to mistake one for the other. So with the peoples of the nearer East—Turks, Armenians, many of the Arabs, they are so much alike to outward seeming that one might easily pass muster for the other. No, this Nejib-butler, he is no Armenian; neither was the Bogos person who did the colonel's electrical work; they may not be Turks, I strongly doubt they are, but certainly beyond a doubt they are Assassins. Yes, of course."

"And you think Miss Ditmas can enlighten us?" I asked.

He raised shoulders, hands and eyebrows in a shrug. "Undoubtlessly she can, but will she?" he replied.

The early winter dusk was falling as we stopped before the house where Margaret Ditmas lived. "I'm not sure Miss Ditmas is in," said the attendant at the switchboard; "I'll ring her apartment——"

"Excuse me, you will do nothing of the kind," de Grandin interrupted. "Ringing telephones and sending in cards are only temptations to weak-souled ones to lie. We shall go ourselves to see if she is in, and—do not ring that telephone."

"You heard him, feller," Captain Chenevert added. "If anybody tips Miss Ditmas off we're on our way to see her, you're going to know what the inside of a nice, home-like jail looks like, and I don't mean maybe. See?"

Apparently the operator saw, for it was with an expression of surprize that the trim colored maid met us at the door of the apartment and ushered us in.

Miss Ditmas leant back in a wing chair, a gown of clinging gray swathing her lissome form from throat to insteps. A string of pearls hung round her neck, pearl studs were in her ears, a great pearl solitaire gleamed on the third finger of her right hand, upon her feet were sandals clasped about her ankles with pearl catches, and the little thread of platinum encircling her left ankle shone glimmeringly in the candlelight against her bare, pale-ivory skin. She lay back in the chair like one who slept, or rested after illness, and from the long, thin cigarette which dropped from her right hand a twisting trail of smoke went up, and as I caught its scent I thought of her quotation of the night before: "Ambergris—for passion."

She turned her head listlessly as we appeared, her clear white profile and night-black hair standing out in charming silhouette against the elfin candlelight, and a faint, wan smile stole across her face

like the smile of one who sleeps and dreams a sweetly melancholy dream.

"No, Doctor de Grandin, I haven't the faintest idea what it was that Colonel Hilliston feared," she replied in a low, sleepy voice. "Yes, I'd noticed how he'd reinforced his doors and windows, but the house stands in a lonely location, and he had many beautiful and expensive things in his collection. I suppose he wanted to make sure the place wouldn't be burglarized; don't you?"

Once more she smiled that slow, disinterested smile, and inhaled deeply from her amber-scented cigarette.

"I really don't know what I meant by what I said to Doctor Trowbridge when the lights went out," she answered his next query. "What does anybody mean by such hysterical statements? I was startled, terrified, when we were plunged in sudden darkness, and—do you know, I believe I'd taken too much wine at dinner! How I came to say anything about something getting in is more than I can imagine. Nothing got in really, did it? Unless it were the person who made off with poor Nejib just after my escape from that dreadful thing which dropped out of the ceiling?"

"Mademoiselle," de Grandin told her sternly, "this is not a *salle d'armes.*"

"Really, Doctor, I don't quite understand."

"Very well, let us be frank as friends are frank. This is no place for fencing. We are come to ask you certain questions, it is true; but we have also come to warn you and protect you."

"Warn? Protect me? Whatever from?"

"From the Brethren of the Knife, *Mademoiselle;* from the wielders of the Scarlet Knife of Hassan!"

Her face went blank, then gray-white as a corpse's countenance, as he shot out the bald statement, but she took a sudden grip upon herself, and:

"I haven't the remotest idea what you're talking about," she told him.

"Au 'voir, Mademoiselle, even *le bon Dieu* is powerless to help those who will not help themselves," he answered tonelessly, and made her one of his stiff, Continental bows, that straight-backed bow which always suggested uniform and corset to me.

"Come, my friends, we have important duties to perform," he told Chenevert and me as he led us from the room.

"Now where?" the captain asked as we waited for the automatic elevator.

"Upstairs," the Frenchman answered. "The flat above is vacant."

"What the devil——"

"Tiens, not the devil in his proper person, perhaps, but certainly his myrmidons," replied de Grandin with a grin. "Come, hurry; we waste our precious time in argument."

Arrived one story up, he tried the handle of the entrance to the suite directly above Miss Ditmas', found it locked, and as matter-of-factly as though setting a broken arm, set to picking the lock with scientific neatness and dispatch.

"Softly, if you please," he cautioned as we entered the vacant rooms; "I would not have our footsteps heard below."

Tiptoeing to the window, he inspected the fire escape which zigzagged down the building's side, nodded with a smile of satisfaction and turned again to us. "In half an hour they should come," he whispered. "Do you compose yourselves to wait, my friends; smoke, if you like, but do not speak above a whisper, and keep back from the window. We do not know where they may lurk or how thoroughly they may be watching."

The minutes dragged away and I was getting stiff from sitting on the floor with my back against the unupholstered wall when: *"P-s-st!"* de Grandin's sharp, admonitory hiss attracted my attention.

"La fenêtre—the window; look!" he ordered softly.

I looked up just in time to see a shadow, but a faint shade darker than the outside gloom, go floating downward past the casement, and half rose with an exclamation when his warning, upraised finger and another hiss arrested me. One, two, three times the window was blocked out by downward-drifting shadows, then de Grandin crept across the room, swung the casement back with slow and wary care, thrust his head forth and glanced quickly up and down, then motioned us to follow him.

"What——" Chenevert began; but:

"S-s-sh, great stupid one, be quiet!" the Frenchman warned him sharply. "This is no parade we make; leave the music home."

Step by cautious step we clambered down the fire escape, de Grandin in the lead, Chenevert and I nearly treading on his toes.

No sound reached our ears as we came opposite Miss Ditmas' open window. The room was dark as Erebus.

"Silence!" warned the Frenchman; then, his hand upon his pistol, "Follow me." He stepped through the open window, sweeping the room with his flashlight.

The place was in disorder, showing signs of recent struggle, but was empty of human life.

"Nom d'un coq!" exclaimed de Grandin sharply. "After them! We must find them, right away, at once; immediately! God grant that we come not too late!"

The door communicating with the hall was locked, and: "Burst it open," he exclaimed; "we have no time to pick the lock."

Suiting action to his words, we put our shoulders to the panels. It held us back a moment, but at the third rush it gave way, precipitating us into the hall.

"This way!" He hurried down the passage to a glazed door marked "Freight Elevator." He pressed the button savagely, but the automatic lift failed to respond.

"Ha, *par la barbe d'un poisson,* undoubtlessly they took her down that ninety-times-damned lift," he panted as we hastened down the winding stairs. "They have wedged the lower door ajar to shut off our pursuit, for the mechanism will not lift unless all shaft-doors have been closed. But we have nimble legs, *parbleu,* and follow fast upon their heels!

"Outside, quickly!" he commanded as we reached the bottom floor. "They have secreted her within the basement, I damn think, but they are no fools, those ones. They will have locked the door behind them, and they would murder her while we were breaking through. This way!"

We burst into the outer air, and de Grandin ran fleetly out into the alley.

"Ah! God be thanked!" he exclaimed, pointing to a row of narrow windows set flush with the ground. "There *is* an entrance from outside. They are small, these windows, but not too small for Jules de Grandin, I damn think."

Cautiously, treading lightly as a cat, he examined each of the windows in turn. They were grimy, and impossible to see through clearly, but through the glass of one a light could be dimly seen. Just as he knelt in an attempt to peer through, a voice came thickly from the room inside.

"Oh, God!" a woman moaned despairingly. "Have pity on me, Hassan! I didn't tell them anything, I wouldn't—*oh!"* The exclamation cut her speech in half.

"No, you did not tell them—yet," the butler answered in a low and oddly hissing voice. "Nor will you tell, my pretty. The brand, the bowstring and the bay await you, even as they did that other who——"

"Oh, no—*no!* Not that, for pity's sake!" the tortured girl entreated. "I tell you I had no intention of disclosing anything! The Frenchman and the others came to call this evening, but I told them nothing—nothing! I swear it; I——"

The crashing of glass and tearing of rotten wood cut short her plea as de Grandin kicked in the window-frame and launched himself through the narrow opening.

"*Pardonnez-moi, Mademoiselle,* one dislikes to contradict a lady, but you told us much this afternoon," he interrupted as he landed, cat-like, on his feet.

Chenevert and I were close behind him, and our flashlights, stabbing through the cellar's light, disclosed a startling tableau. Upon the rug, birth-nude, knelt Margaret Ditmas. Her ankles were bound beneath her, her wrists were tightly lashed together; her face was a picture of utter despair. Two men stood near her, one slowly whipping a long, thin cord—picture-wire!—back and forth before him, the other heating something in a little charcoal brazier such as plumbers used to carry before the days of the gas-torch. But it was the one who stood with folded arms before her that drew and held my gaze as a magnet draws a needle.

The figure was clothed in a long white robe, with a curious head-piece that completely veiled the face except for two large, square eye-holes covered with gauze that hid the eyes behind them. On the front of the robe a dagger was embroidered in vivid red thread—the red knife of the Assassins, of whom Miss Ditmas had told us.

For an instant the tableau held. Then:

"*Non,* do not move, *Messieurs,* or—*eh bien,* since you request it!"

Three knives flashed from their hidden sheaths even as he spoke, but quicker than the knives were Jules de Grandin's shots. So fast he fired it seemed as if a single line of flame were flashing from the muzzle of his automatic pistol, and the man above the brazier toppled over with his hands clasped to his stomach, while the fellow with the picture-wire hunched his shoulders forward as though about to sneeze, emitted a soft hiccup and fell face-downward on the rug, a spate of blood spilling from his gaping mouth.

The masked figure in front of Margaret Ditmas stood unmovable, swaying slightly, like a person seized with vertigo; then, like a tree which woodsmen have sawn through, his swaying motion quickened, and he toppled sideways, crashing down upon the floor, his long, curved knife still grasped within his hand. It was not till later that I learned de Grandin had shot the butler through the brain (for Nejib, the "Armenian," it was). He must have died upon his feet a full ten seconds before he fell.

"*EH BIEN,* she has had a shock, that one," de Grandin murmured as he looked in Margaret Ditmas' still, set face. "Cut the cursed cords off her and bear her to her bed, Friend Trowbridge. Me, I shall call police and coroner. Her story can await on our convenience, now."

The girl seemed curiously light in my arms as I carried her into the garish modernistic bedroom with its chromium-plated furniture and laid her on the big, flat bed, drawing a down-stuffed comforter over her. In the black-and-silver bathroom I found smelling-salts and a bottle of aromatic bromides, and I brought her from her faint with wet towels and

the salts, then gave her thirty grains of bromide. Presently she slept.

I sat beside her, hours, it seemed, while de Grandin and Chenevert moved round the room beyond, inspecting the three bodies, 'phoning to the coroner, examining the branding-iron, shaped like a hiltless knife with exaggeratedly curved blade, attending to the hundred and one things which policemen have to do in such a case.

Day came without dawn. The somber winter blackness of the night faded imperceptibly to smoky gray, at last to something like full daylight, but there was no sun, and in the sky the snow-clouds hovered threateningly.

"She is better? She has slept?" de Grandin asked as he and Chenevert came in quietly.

"Yes," I answered to both questions. "She should be all right, now, though I think a period of rest would do her good."

"Undoubtlessly," he acquiesced, "but she has all her life to rest if she is so disposed, while we are very busy.

"*Mademoiselle* — Mademoiselle Margot!" he called softly.

She turned restlessly, muttering inaudible words, then, childishly, reached out and took my hand, cuddling it against her cheek, and smiled. A fierce, protective tenderness surged up in me. "For heaven's sake, de Grandin, let the child rest!" I urged him; but:

"*Mademoiselle*, it is morning!" he persisted.

A KIMONO draped around her shoulders, Margaret Ditmas sat in bed sipping at the tea de Grandin had prepared for her. "You're sure they're dead?" she asked him with an apprehensive look.

"As dead as forty herring—dead as mutton," he assured her. "Me, I made them so, and I am most particular about my killings, *Mademoiselle.*"

Reassured, she went on with her narrative: "I met Arbuthnot Hilliston in Jerusalem when Helen Cassaway and I were touring through the Orient last year," she told us.

"He was a fascinating man, and our acquaintance quickly became an intimate friendship. He knew a lot of places which no tourist ever sees, and the more we went about with him, the more his fascination seemed to grow on us. One day, as we were riding toward the site of the old Joppa Gate, he asked us how we'd like to witness the secret rites of the Assassins. Neither of us had ever heard of them, but the name sounded thrilling, and, of course, we agreed enthusiastically.

"From what he told us it seemed they were a revival of an ancient secret order founded by some old Persian in the Eleventh Century, and in their heyday they were more powerful even than the orders of military knights of the Crusades. They'd exacted tribute from the mightiest, and when the tribute wasn't paid, they killed. The Sultan Malik-Shah, the Califs Mostarshid and Rashid, fell beneath their daggers, as did Count Raymond, Christian ruler of Tripoli. Would seeing a lodge meeting of such an order, even though it were only a sort of pale modern copy of the flamboyant ancient original, be a thrill to any girls? You know the answer.

"Arbuthnot took us to the place. The night was dark, and we went in closed carriages; so neither of us knew where we were going, but when we got there we had to take our Western clothing off and put on long white gowns of some sort of heavy muslin with a scarlet dagger embroidered on the left breast. Then cap-veils were brought us, and we put them on. Not network veils, such as we have

here, but heavy cotton *haiks*, which were fastened over our faces just low enough below the cap-like head-dresses to let our eyes look out. Then we put about a dozen silver bracelets on each arm and two or three heavy silver rings about our ankles so that we clanked like moving hardware stores at every step, and went barefoot into the big, bare hall where a lot of veiled women and masked men sat round the wall and stared at us.

"The head Assassin—I suppose you'd call him the high priest?—met us in the center of the hall and held out his hands to us. We knelt and put our folded hands between his and he repeated some sort of welcome in Arabic, and when the right times came Arbuthnot told us to nod, and we nodded. That was all—we thought.

"A little later, though, they brought out cups of sherbet spiced with some strong, bitter drug—I learned later that it was hashish!—and it made us crazy as fishes out of water. I remember swaying back and forth in my seat, and having a queer feeling as though the air about me were dissolving; as though I were in a rarer and clearer atmosphere, something like the feeling when you inhale nitrous oxid in the dentist's chair, you know. When some queer-sounding music started I felt I simply had to dance, and I got up, ripped the smothering veil away from my face and did the best imitation of an Oriental dance I could. Suddenly a masked man leaped up from his seat against the wall, seized me in his arms, and——" She paused, and a dull, red flush came to her face.

"Perfectly, *Mademoiselle*, one understands," de Grandin told her evenly. "And later——"

"Next day we learned that we'd been through the ceremony of initiation and were duly enrolled members of the sect, or order. We'd sworn to do the will of the society without question, and—well, it didn't take us long to get away from there.

"WE CAME home, and here, in peaceful, matter-of-fact America, it seemed as though it were all part of some wild and rather unpleasant dream. Then, one afternoon, Helen called me up from her home in Paterson. 'Daisy,' she said, 'something *terrible* has happened.'

"Helen Cassaway was the kind of person to whom something 'terrible' was always happening; so I wasn't particularly impressed, even though her voice seemed charged with terror.

" 'What is it this time?' I asked her. 'Has the boy friend found another girl?'

" 'Daisy!' she replied reproachfully, 'please listen. You remember that dreadful lodge we joined with Arbuthnot Hilliston in Jerusalem?'

"You may be sure I began to pay attention then. 'Well?' I asked.

" 'Today an Armenian rug-peddler came to our house, and asked for me. I hadn't the faintest idea how he knew my name, but I was interested; so I saw him. Daisy, he was from the Assassins' lodge! He held out a little card with the picture of a red dagger on it—just like the daggers embroidered on the gowns we wore when we joined the society—and said it was the Knife of Hassan. When I asked him what he meant, he said it was the sign of the Assassins, and he had come to demand my services. He wanted me to go downtown with him tonight and help him in a *badger game*. He's got the man all picked out, and all I have to do is obey his orders.'

" 'What in the world's a badger game?' I asked.

" 'It's a sort of blackmail scheme. A woman flirts with a man, and then goes somewhere with him, and when they're

there alone another man who pretends to be the woman's husband comes rushing in, and threatens to make a scandal unless the poor dupe who's fallen for the woman's charms pays him hush money, and——'

" 'Did you send him packing?' I asked.

" 'I most certainly did, and he was furious—told me that no one could refuse to serve the Red Knife of Hassan, and that the branding-iron, the bowstring and the bay awaited all who were disobedient.'

" 'Well,' I told her, 'you'd better go to the police. It may not be very easy to confess that you're mixed up with such a gang of scoundrels, but it'll be a lot easier than trying to dodge their persecutions on your own account. Besides, that fellow ought to be locked up. He's a dangerous character.'

" 'I'm going right now,' she told me as she hung up, and——"

"Yes, *Mademoiselle,* and——"

"She walked out of her house on the way to the police and no one ever saw her again."

"And how long ago did all this happen, if you please?"

"About two months."

"U'm, one understands. And then——"

"Arbuthnot Hilliston came home, and I got in touch with him at once. 'You got me into this,' I told him; 'now you've got to get me out. Helen Cassaway's disappeared as though she'd fallen in the bay, and I don't know what minute they'll be putting the finger on me.'

" 'My dear girl,' he answered, 'I'd be pleased to help you, but they're after me, too. I was told to do some spying on the French high command in Syria, but I've no desire to be stood up against a wall at sunrise; so I put for home. They tried to get me twice, and nearly succeeded each time, but I think I'm safe, for a while at least. I've got an Armenian servant—they hate the Moslems like sin, you know—and at his suggestion he got in touch with an Armenian workman here who's made my house over into a veritable fortress. If you're game to defy the conventions, you're welcome to come out and stop with me. Nejib, my servant, will attend to everything for us, and we'll have only some local help come in by the day, so there'll be no suspicious characters entering the house. If we play lost for a while, maybe the whole business will blow over.'

"The very night I went to stay at his house, you and Doctor Trowbridge came to dinner. I'd heard of you, of course, Doctor de Grandin, and thought that you could help us if anybody could. I drew Doctor Trowbridge as my dinner partner, and was beginning to lead up to asking him to ask you to help us when we went into the drawing-room. Then Arbuthnot was killed so terribly, and when you showed me the Red Knife of Hassan you'd found on his body, and they almost got me with their infernal machine, I knew that it was hopeless. If they could get into that steel-barred and double-locked house of Arbuthnot's, there wasn't any safety for me anywhere.

"I thought they'd killed poor Nejib when I heard him scream out in the pantry, but this afternoon he called me on the 'phone and said he had managed to escape, though they were hunting for him. He warned me not to tell you anything if you came to see me, and said he and two Armenian friends would come secretly to take me to a place of safety tonight. I was to let Lily, my maid, go home early, and leave the window by the fire escape unlatched, so they could come in without being seen.

"So I pleaded ignorance when you ar-

rived, and waited in a perfect fever of apprehension till Nejib and the others came—and when they did, I found *they* were Assassins, and Nejib's real name was Hassan. Then——"

"*Précisément, Mademoiselle,* the rest we know," de Grandin interrupted with a smile.

"You have, perhaps, a—how do you call him, little cellar? — cellarette? — around?"

"Why, yes, over in that cabinet you'll find some Scotch and rye, and some brandy, too, if you prefer."

"Prefer? *Mon Dieu,*" he looked at her reproachfully, "who would drink whisky when brandy is available, *Mademoiselle?*"

Place Names

By KATHERINE VAN DER VEER

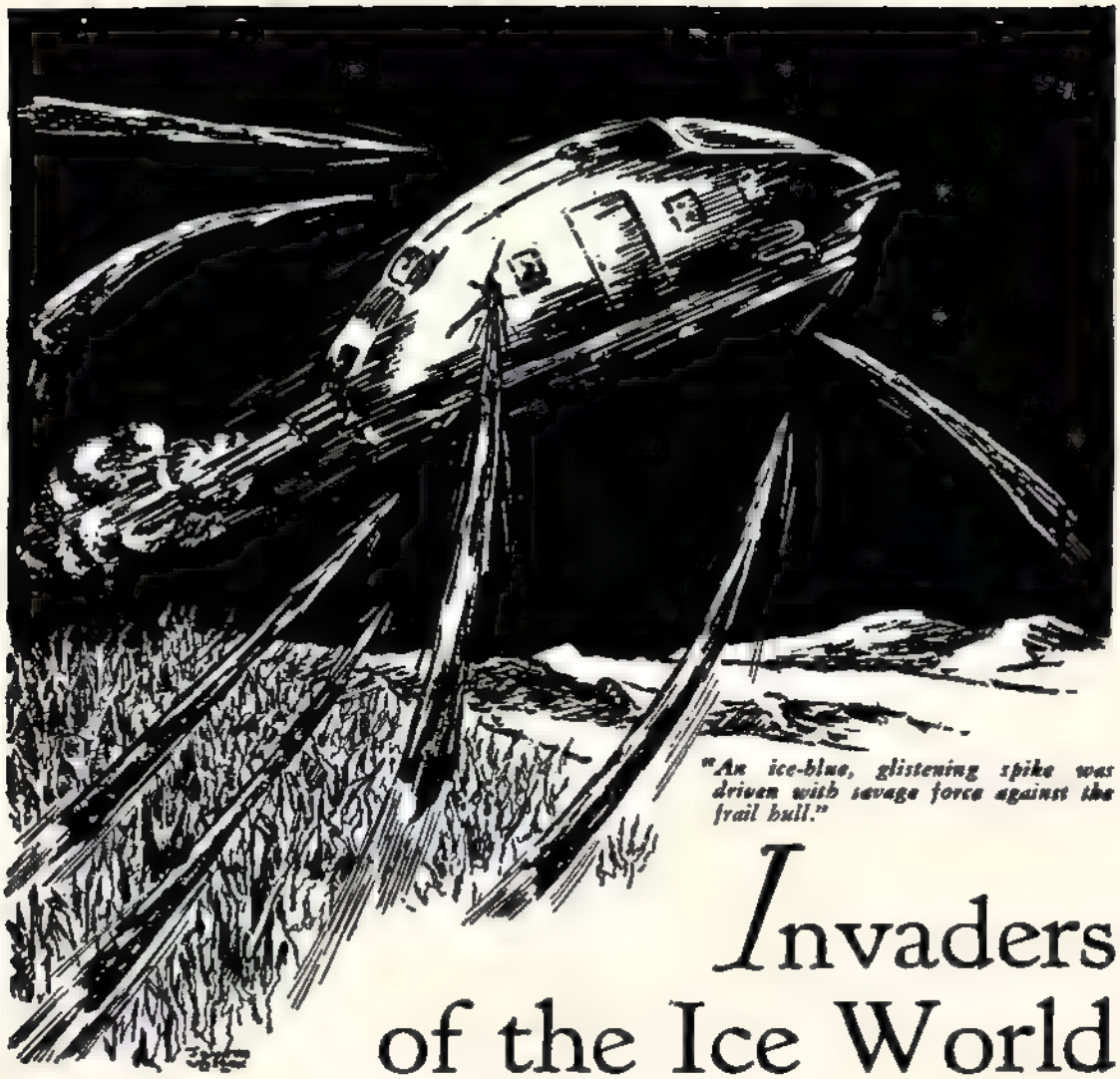
What magic lies about a whispered name
That sends one headlong out of space and time,
That lights within a clear and lonely flame
To burn unseen on some forgotten shrine?

"I brought this fan from Spain," was all she said—
Out of a courtyard, cobblestoned and white,
The click of castanets, a faint guitar,
Came on a scented wind across the night.

I saw great mountain peaks, snow-crowned and stern,
Fountains and gardens, rose-hung, trimly set,
The shimmering Genil winding far below
Granada's Moorish pile and parapet.

A peasant breaking stone beside the road,
With leathery hands, soft dust upon his hair,
Toiling to keep his tiny whitewashed home,
Smiled as I passed, intangible as air.

So frail a thing, this journey that I went
In insubstantial form, there fell again
The veil that hides the present from the past
And threw the haunting shadow of a pain.



"An ice-blue, glistening spike was driven with savage force against the frail hull."

Invaders of the Ice World

By JACK WILLIAMSON

An astounding tale of the far-distant future, when the sun grows wan, and sentient creatures spawned by the frost make war upon the survivors of the human race

1. Phantoms of the Frost

THE Tower of the Kars lifted its red and ancient bulk upon a rugged mountain crest. Above it the sky was for ever dark, save for the cold far gleams of stars; for the sun had ages since cooled to a black and ice-rimmed sphere, robbing even the frozen moon of its reflected radiance.

From the huge looming cylinder of the tower fell steep and grim defiles, choked with ghostly banks of the eternal snow. Far below the gorges and precipitous slopes of the isolated peak stretched barren, frosty plains that once had been buried two miles beneath the Pacific, broken with the armored sheets of shallow seas whose ice had not been thawed in ten thousand years.

The world was black, a domain of

cruel silent winter and endless night. Cold constellations wheeled eternally through a sky that no longer knew the dawn. Snow lay ghostly white in the starshine, from age to frigid age. That dark, immutable sky was never clouded, and the bitter air was still, for even the wind had died with the passing sun.

From the upper apartments of the tower, Fal-Kar was staring down through a thick window of insulating crystal, at the weird dark realm of unending winter. A splendid specimen was he of the hardy, resourceful remnant of humanity that clung on upon a dead planet, defying a nature turned grim destroyer.

Seven feet tall Fal-Kar stood; his form mighty, though gracefully proportioned —those survivors of the ages could have been no weaklings. His straight, magnificent body was covered with a very short, smooth fur of golden brown; and in the room, which was heated with the precious fire of radium, he wore no clothing.

Save for his gigantic size and his golden fur he differed little in appearance from the men of the age when science was born. His eyes, though hypersensitive that they might penetrate the perpetual gloom, were not unduly large. Their blue, sober keenness gave his rugged, hairless face an air of iron determination. But those blue eyes now were haunted.

From the lofty window Fal-Kar stared down over snow-swept rugged slopes and vast black plains, over seas that were sheets of ice. He overlooked a world of death, of desolation, of doom. Nothing there was green. Nothing lived. Nothing had moved or changed there in a thousand centuries.

Yet it seemed sometimes to Fal-Kar that living hostile forces lurked unseen beyond the dark horizons. The cruel menace of the frozen world sometimes took life in his fancy, a brooding, alien monster, that grasped at him with frozen fingers of fear.

Fal-Kar's mind was haunted by phantoms of the frost, phantoms that seemed to creep upon him, invisible on icy plain and frozen sea and dark mountain range, watching, waiting. Waiting until the last man was dead, until they could rule the world.

"You are brooding again, my son," a strong genial voice rang in the high chamber. "You must forget those fancies. We have work to do—and not long to finish it!"

FAL-KAR turned to look at his father, who had just entered the metal-walled room, snapping on the radium light-tube that flooded it with warm, pinkish radiance.

Tro-Kar was tall as his mighty son; and age had not much weakened his great body, though the fine short fur that covered him had all become silver. Like his son's, his eyes were blue; they twinkled with a good humor, an optimism, that was indomitable.

"But Father, can't you feel them?" Fal-Kar demanded, with a fearful gesture toward the window. "The phantoms of the frost! Waiting out there in the frozen night. Mocking at our labor. Laughing, while they wait for the last man to die!"

Tro-Kar laughed; he seized his son's shoulders with strong, great hands, and wheeled him from the window.

"Don't give way to your imagination, Fal-Kar," he urged. "I know that the shadow of vast peril is on us, and humanity. But one city left, of the four that survived when I came first to the Tower of the Kars. And even the radium mines under the city of Zen are now exhausted, so that it must soon fall before the

conquering cold, unless our work is done.

"Great, I realize, is the danger. But all the more reason for effort! Enough of giving way to dreams!"

"You're right, Father. Forgive me!"

Fal-Kar laughed, and lifted the white giant affectionately in his mighty arms.

"Yet we will cheat those specters of their victory, and drive them from the planet with the rays of our new atomic sun!"

"Put it so if you will," gasped the older man, as Fal-Kar set him down. "And now to the laboratory, my son, to check your new electronic reactions. They promise us much."

Arm in arm, golden-brown giant and silvered one, they walked from the room, bearing upon their great shoulders the hopes of humanity.

It was long since Fal-Kar had left the lone surviving city of Zen, splendid metropolis beneath the shimmering green dome of its insulating Zone, to come to this lonely mountain tower. He had been only a youth, then, a weakling, ignorant of the great work of the Kars and his own part in it.

But often he recalled the time—as he recalled also the girl, Del-Ara, whom he had left unwillingly behind at the shimmering ray-screens of the Zone.

His father had met him as he stepped from the silvered shell of the little rocket-driven sky-sled, at the base of the looming red tower. Without a word they moved the light vehicle into the building, through the massive valves that shut out the cold. Both were shivering, then, from their brief exposure; and they bent over the glowing red coil of a radium heater.

"This is the Tower of the Kars," his father boomed, speaking for the first time. "Within it we have labored for ten generations, my son, working at the greatest task that men have ever attempted. It is not done. Nor will it be finished in my life. That, Fal-Kar, is why I sent for you."

"What's that, Father? I always have wondered why you should imprison yourself in this cold, lonely tower, when Zen is so bright and so beautiful beneath her glowing Zone."

"You will understand, my son. I want you to work with me, and carry our task on to completion after I am dead."

"You mean I must live in this gloomy place?"

"Our laboratory is here, Fal-Kar. The work is too dangerous to be carried on in the city. And I must warn you, though I am sorry, that you will not have much time to visit Zen. Our labor will demand all that is in you."

"But I can't leave Zen! I know a girl there—Del-Ara is her name. She was studying with me in the Hall of Science. Father, she is a lovely being — if you could see her!"

"I'm afraid our task will leave you no time in youth for love, my son," the older man said slowly. "When you are about to grow old, if you see that you can not finish the task of the Kars, you must have a son to carry on the work. But is is far too soon for you to think of that."

"But Father," Fal-Kar protested urgently, "I can't give her up!" He took Tro-Kar's arm. "I know you are a scientist. Science is wonderful, but life——"

"Wait, my son, until I have told you what the task is, what it means to humanity, to life."

Young, then, and a little headstrong, Fal-Kar looked across the gleaming red coil at his father. He stared almost as at a stranger, for he had lived with his mother in Zen until she died in a rocket liner that was lost in the ice-gripped

mountains northward, and then in the Hall of Science. His father he had seen only briefly and rarely, when he came to the city for equipment and supplies.

Impatiently, unwillingly, he listened.

"I KNOW that Zen is bright and beautiful, my son, beneath the green, glorious crown of her Zone. But that beauty is frail. The cruel talons of the cold ever menace it, waiting to snatch away her gay people if the Zone should fall.

"You know, Fal-Kar" — the older man's voice had become deep and very earnest—"you know that we have drawn upon the energy of radium to heat and light our cities, to do all our work, for the thousands of centuries since the sun grew cold. But in the last few millennia the supplies of radium have failed. One by one the mines have been exhausted and abandoned. Every deposit in the crust of the planet has been worked out. The radium is used up! The supply of it that remains in Zen will not keep the Zone burning even through your own lifetime."

"I had guessed that much, Father," admitted Fal-Kar, "though the Six make a secret of how much radium remains in the vaults. But what can be done? We can't hope to stop the cold. We can't restore the dead sun. Better to forget what is inevitable, and enjoy the little time that remains. Del-Ara and I have talked of it."

Tro-Kar smiled soberly, and leaned across the glowing coil to set a great hand on his son's shoulder.

"We *can* hope, my son! Many generations ago the house of Kar foresaw this crisis. Our fathers set themselves the task of meeting it. They built this mountain laboratory; for ten generations we Kars have labored here."

"But the sun is dead, Father. The heat of the earth's interior was long ago used up. The wind and the tides have become too feeble to serve us. Now the radium is gone. What else is there? What can we hope to do?"

"We have all about us, Fal-Kar, a more powerful source of energy than any you name. The atoms of every substance are reservoirs of pure electricity. Tap them, and we have means to warm and illuminate the whole planet again — for all time."

"The atom, yes. But they taught us in the Hall of Science that its locked energies can never be released."

The great hand closed like a steel vise on Fal-Kar's shoulder; his father's voice grew deeper with stiff determination.

"Others have tried and failed, my son. But the Kars never fail. Ten generations have we labored. And you are fortunate, Fal-Kar. Nine of us have died with our task unfinished. So, I foresaw long ago, should I. But you shall witness our triumph!"

"How can you know that?"

"You *must!*" Great fingers dug into Fal-Kar's shoulder. "You must! For the radium in the vaults of Zen will not last out your life. The atom must be conquered in your lifetime, to save Zen, to save mankind. Even to save the girl you spoke of—think of that! You will do it, my son. The Kars can not fail."

THAT meeting of father and son had fallen far into the past. Fal-Kar had learned much, changed much, since then. In body and in spirit, he had grown. No longer was he a youth, but a strong man, driving with unfailing energy and resolution toward accomplishment of the task the Kars had set themselves.

But even so he had not forgotten Del-Ara. Sometimes, on the rare occasions

when he drove his tiny radium-powered sky-sled to Zen for supplies, he was with her for a few joyous hours. Her beauty, he thought, had increased with time, as her lithe strong body developed beneath its velvet, snow-white fur. She, too, had found a work, attending the great generators of the Zone.

"Thus," she told Fal-Kar, "I, too, can serve the race until your great work is done. It makes it easier to wait for you until we may be together again."

Fal-Kar had the great tower laboratory now largely to himself; he had taken the reins of the research in his own hands and forged ahead beyond his father. Tro-Kar had become little more than a gifted assistant, most aiding his son by his courage, his enthusiasm, his boundless faith in the Kars.

The old man had so far relinquished his active part in the ancient quest as to erect an observatory upon the great roof of the tower, and spend there many hours studying the dead, dark moon which still followed the freezing world, like a haunting specter.

Even in the intense absorption of his labor, Fal-Kar saw that his father was worried at what he saw upon the black satellite, and demanded what it might be.

"The ancient task of the Kars is enough to absorb all your faculties, my son," was his answer. "To share this new problem would unwisely increase your burden. You must leave it in my hands."

And Fal-Kar toiled on in the laboratory, fighting off the fears and gloomy fancies that descended upon him with the twilight of a dying world. Then came the day when he swarmed up the metal ladder to his father's high observatory, and burst eagerly into its instrument-crowded dome.

"The phantoms of the frost are conquered!" he shouted, seizing Tro-Kar's silvery shoulder to jerk him from the ocular of a great telescope. "I have checked the last reaction. You yourself will see the atomic generator, Father. The new sun! And soon!"

The old man remained wearily in his seat, with Fal-Kar's eager hand resting on his passive shoulder.

In the midst of his elation, Fal-Kar was struck abruptly with the gravity of his father's expression, with the naked dread haunting his blue eyes.

"Why, Father," he cried in sudden concern. "What troubles you? Is it you who now fear the phantoms of the frost? And when the labor of the Kars is done?"

"But it is not done," Tro-Kar said, with slow solemnity. "Not until our new sun flames above the mountain. And it must be done very soon—or never! Even now, perhaps, it is too late."

"But, Father, what do you mean?"

"For a long time, my son," the old man whispered, "I have been studying the face of our dead neighbor, the moon. I have not let you concern yourself with what I have seen. But it is a strange thing, weird and fearful."

"Tell me—what is it?"

"Wait, my son. I shall let you see it with your own eyes. But it is something, I believe, like your haunting phantoms of the frost. Your subconscious mind, perhaps, was warning you of the same things that the telescope reveals—sinister entities born of the cold on a frozen dead world, to war against warmth and light and the life we know."

2. The Menace of the Moon

His mighty body was trembling a little as Fal-Kar seated himself at the eye-piece of the gigantic telescope from which he had, a few moments ago, so joyously pulled his father.

The field of vision was a dark circle before his eye, sifted with diamond dust of stars. Fingers quivering with the dread that filled him, he adjusted the instrument; and the frozen moon crept into the field, a dark blot against the gleaming net of stars.

"I see nothing here to fear," he said. "The moon is black and dead, as it has been since the sun went out."

"Wait, Fal-Kar, until I increase the power."

The dark, ominous disk swelled until it filled almost the whole vast field. And Fal-Kar saw abruptly that it was no longer completely black. Weird phosphorescent flickerings raced across its somber face, evanescent gleams of icy blue and frozen violet.

Strange changing lights of cold blue-violet wove fantastic patterns upon the surface of the somber satellite. They flowed in rivers of chill radiance across jagged lunar mountains. They condensed into swirling balls of gelid flame above abysmal craters.

Whirling masses of frigid luminescence gathered and thickened, and seemed to leap away from the rugged face of the moon.

"I *do* see something," Fal-Kar breathed at last. "Moving cold lights on the moon. What *are* they? What do they mean? They seem almost—*living!*"

"They *are* living," said Tro-Kar, "but not as we live, it is true. You have seen a new form of life, Fal-Kar, born of the cold: living entities, made up of substances and forces that are alien to our sort of life, hostile, destructive. They belong to a new order of existence, risen by the inevitable law of nature to people the frozen planets of a dead universe."

Fal-Kar sought to recover himself from the momentary horror that had seized him.

"Even so, Father, what is their threat to us? The moon is far away. Soon, with our new atomic sun flaming above the tower, we shall be for ever secure from the cold."

"So I hoped, Fal-Kar, at first," the old man said, wearily. "But the new life has not remained upon the moon. Since cold is its nature, it finds the frozen dark vacuum and the strange energies of interplanetary space a bridge, as we always found them an impassable barrier."

"You mean," Fal-Kar gasped incredulously, "the things—the lights—that I saw will be able to come across to the earth?"

"They are not only able to do it," his father said heavily. "That I have long known. Only today did I discover that they have already done it."

"*Already!*" cried Fal-Kar. "Already on the *earth?*"

"They are. More, they have found Zen. And hating light and warmth and our kind of life as they must, they are a menace, my son. A peril beyond conception."

"But what are they? What are they like?"

"I don't know. But like nothing we are familiar with, certainly. They are formed of chemical combinations that can exist only at the low temperatures of a dead world. Their alien forms of being will seem strange to us, my son, perhaps incredible. And they may attack us with forces beyond our experience. Unless the new sun is burning very soon, Fal-Kar, the long tale of humanity is ended. How soon can it be ready?"

Strained eagerness was in the old man's tones; as Fal-Kar considered, he cried again, "How soon?"

"The formulæ are simple, Father," Fal-Kar said at last. "I shall ask you to derive them for me; you can do it in a

day. But we must have power to inaugurate the process, more power than can be supplied by our own generators."

"Then we are lost," Tro-Kar breathed in dismay.

"No," smiled Fal-Kar, grimly. "While you are deriving the formulæ and setting up the other apparatus, I shall go to Zen and bring back one of the great radium cells that are used to maintain the Zone."

"It is a time of danger," Tro-Kar objected. "And the Six have none too much radium. They are not likely to let you take a cell; they never thought highly of this quest of the Kars. Their own scientists ever said we were mad to attempt to unlock the atom."

"I shall bring back the cell," Fal-Kar promised grimly, rising from the telescope.

His father smiled fondly, and embraced him.

"You are a Kar, my son. You can not fail! But you must set out at once. And hasten. Already the invaders make travel perilous. Remember, the fate of humanity rests with you. And that of your lovely Del-Ara! And the odds are against you! Hasten!"

3. Creatures of Cold

FAL-KAR and his father opened the mighty valves in the base of the red, ancient tower, dragged the slender bright shell of the sky-sled out upon the frost-rimed platform. Quickly, in the piercing chill of the motionless, bitter air, they embraced. Then the white giant ran back into the tower, and Fal-Kar slipped swiftly within the torpedo-shaped frail hull of crystal and argent metal.

The door sealed and the heater coil glowing red at his feet, he touched the controls. Golden flame leapt backward and downward from the radium-activated rockets; and the silvery shell lifted from the platform to soar away across crag-walled gorges and ghostly slopes of snow.

The sky was a black bowl inverted. The stars burned in it, living points, bright and diamond-hard. The galaxy was a streak of silver fire spilled across its velvet darkness. And against a white star-cloud hung the moon, a blot somberly and ominously dark.

The voice of the rockets was a shrilling scream; and trails of golden flame hung in the darkness behind the hurtling sky-sled, as it flashed across the lower snow-swept slopes of the lofty peak on which the tower stood, across deserts of star-lit frost beyond, and over ghostly flat ice-plains that were seas.

Fal-Kar drove toward the far city of Zen. This flight he had made many times, on his brief visits to the city. Every dark rock and leprous patch of snow was familiar to him. . . . And he saw abruptly, with wonder and heart-stilling dread, that the grim landscape ahead had changed, as it had not changed in centuries of centuries.

A forest had sprung up on the dark ice-plains before him, such a forest as no man had imagined. Its growths were spiked, sword-like things, rather than trees, branching crazily. They were more gigantic than anything that ever had grown upon the planet, lifting the points of their bright spears thousands of feet, to Fal-Kar's customary level of flight.

The forest glittered. The jagged blades of its uncanny growths shimmered as if formed of frozen pale light. They were like sharp crystals condensed from some fluid of pure cold; ice-blue and chill violet.

Even as Fal-Kar steered the frail sky-sled toward it, slanting upward to avoid its glistening spears, the forest altered. It grew.

Keen bright crystalline blades stabbed

with startling abruptness from parent stalks. Thin arrows of frozen radiance, violet-blue, broke from the spiked tangle, darted away above the luminous mass, endued with incomprehensible powers of motion.

Fal-Kar watched one shimmering crystal arrow that plunged down athwart his path and drove into the dark soil below. For a moment it stood there unchanged, a shaft of pale, icy radiance, itself a hundred feet in height.

Then it grew like a plant taking root in the frozen planet. Sword-like branches were thrust out from it, abruptly, at fantastic angles. Soon it was a veritable tree of weird shimmering blades; its development was uncannily, incredibly swift.

This, Fal-Kar knew, was the invading life from the moon; the life of cold and darkness, whose incomprehensible advance could be checked only by the new sun of atomic energy that the Kars had labored so long to create above the mountain. Its development on earth must have begun when some such shaft struck the planet after a flight across the interplanetary void.

He was staggered by the vastness and strangeness of the alien forest, by the weird and unsuspected powers of the invaders. His mind shrank from thought of the obstacles yet to be overcome before the new atomic sun could stop the advance of this astounding lunar life.

Numbed with dread as much as with the pitiless cold that was creeping even into the sealed hull of the sky-sled, Fal-Kar drove upward at a higher angle, accelerating the rocket-feed until the song of the motors was a deafening bellow.

Then the invading entities from the moon demonstrated their awareness and their enmity.

Fal-Kar had been flying amply high to clear the forest. Now a new towering wall of palely shimmering glass-like spears was thrust suddenly up before him.

Desperately he fought to avoid them, but an ice-blue, glistening spike was driven with savage force against the frail hull of the sky-sled. Its thin metal was caved in; a crystal panel shattered.

Fal-Kar flung the vehicle up; he cleared the menacing wall. But already he was shivering before the blast of frigid air that poured through the broken panel.

In moments he was beyond the spiked bright forest.

Before him lay the frosty deserts and smooth ice-plains that stretched away to unseen Zen. The spreading area covered by the invading life was behind. But he had not escaped.

Bright arrows came after him.

Hissing in easy flight, like living, sportive javelins shaped of blue-violet flame frozen into needle-shaped crystals, they pursued him, darted curiously about the crippled sky-sled, drove toward it menacingly.

Even with the rocket-motors open to the full, Fal-Kar could not distance them. Easily they kept pace, arching in smooth flight above him, racing with him challengingly.

Half frozen by the blast of cold through the shattered window, he saw that he must play at the deadly game of the invaders.

When the next keen blue lance darted at him, he dived to meet it until collision appeared unavoidable, then cut in his forward rocket battery, in the nose of the sky-sled. Bright golden flame roared out ahead of him; the plunging dive was abruptly checked, and yellow fire wrapped the thin lance of cold.

The blue arrow was consumed. Like an icicle thrust into a furnace, it dissolved in a wraith of dissipating vapor.

Clenching his chattering teeth, Fal-Kar crouched his trembling body over the controls and drove at another of his weird pursuers. It swerved, fled from him with a speed the sky-sled could not equal. The invaders had learned his power. With the heat of the flaming rocket-blast he could protect himself; but plainly he was helpless to inflict any further injury upon the enemy.

He turned again and flew toward Zen. The glittering arrows followed, cut daringly near him, arched tantalizingly above him, plainly mocking him, tempting him to pursue them, yet never again venturing within range of his incandescent rocket-jets.

Intense cold invaded the slender hull. His breath swirled out in clouds of ice crystals, freezing on his thin golden fur, frosting the observation panels so that he could hardly see. The numbing ache of cold crept up his limbs; his stiff hands could scarcely move the controls.

Ever the fleeting arrows of chill-blue crystal came mockingly nearer—keen bright blades of frozen light. He knew they were laughing at him, waiting for him to freeze and die.

"The phantoms of the frost," he muttered through stiff cold lips. "They laugh, and wait. But they wait in vain. The Kars never fail."

Still he drove on, until the bright Zone above Zen rose like the limb of a warm green sun above the dead ice-fields, against a black, star-dusted sky.

The bright arrows made a final taunting plunge at his crippled flyer, and then hung safely back beyond the Zone, mocking, waiting. . . .

4. *When the Zone Fell*

FAL-KAR could never recall how he drove the sky-sled through the green insulating ray-screens of the Zone and landed it safely in the gardens of Zen. His memory held nothing from the turning back of the enigmatic flying arrows to his awakening on a couch in the roof-gardens of Zen.

He sat up, beneath a gay light awning, and looked upon the brilliant wonders of Zen, last outpost of a dwindling humanity.

Warm air breathed about him, fragrant with the scent of blooms. Green masses of hypertrophied shrubs and vines surrounded his couch, riotous with vivid flowers and heavy with huge ripening fruits, red and golden.

Beyond the garden railing he saw the towers of Zen, graceful slim spires of white metal and many-hued crystal, terraced and crowned with brilliant gardens.

All above was the shimmering green of the Zone, flooding the dark sky with supernal light, the city's only shield against universal cold. A frail thing, the Zone looked, so sheer that the chill bright stars shone through it. Yet, Fal-Kar knew, for many ages that thin dome of vibration was all that had kept the fair slender towers and vivid gardens of Zen beyond the hungry talons of eternal winter.

A few moments he sat there, memory slowly returning. He had no sense of ill-being; his mighty body, with its marvelous capacity for recuperation, had recovered from the exhaustion and exposure of his flight to Zen; he was conscious that he had slept long, far more deeply than usual.

A few moments he sat there; then he was on his feet in abrupt alarm.

This glory of Zen faced deadly peril! Unthinkable, incredible invaders from the moon menaced it with the alien energies of their life of cold. Upon him rested the burden of saving it. And he had been asleep! Vital time was gone!

Every muscle tense in the magnificent body beneath his sleek, golden-brown fur, he ran across the roof-garden, peered anxiously over the bright metal railing into the street below.

And his first illusion of the quiet peace of Zen was shattered.

Of white metal and gayly colored crystal, the walls of the building fell beneath him for many stories, to broad garden-spaces. Those gardens, so bright with bloom and ripening fruit when Fal-Kar last had seen them, were now torn and trampled by panic-stricken multitudes.

Shouting thousands were streaming across them, blind, aimless, mad with the desperation of terror. Behind the fugitives, vivid vegetation was a trampled ruin. Their cries reached Fal-Kar's ears, mingled in a ragged wail of fear.

"What—what has happened?" he muttered, leaning over the rail in motionless surprize and alarm. "Already——"

"It is a frozen horror, come out of the dark wastes to destroy us."

THERE was no panic, no terror in the cool, familiar voice that spoke beside him. Fal-Kar turned, in glad surprize, and saw Del-Ara.

She was standing close to him, staring down at the terrorized throngs, her small strong hands unconsciously tearing the petals from a huge red flower. Not so tall as mighty Fal-Kar, she was lithely slender. The smooth velvet fur on her body was snow-white; against it the long hair of her head fell in a golden cascade. The eyes in her white, clear face, sober, sorrowful as she looked slowly up again at Fal-Kar, were warmly brown.

"Del-Ara!" he gasped. And he whispered again, "Del-Ara!"

He strode to her and picked her up in his golden mighty arms. Her white arms went clingingly around his great shoulders; for a little time the two were pressed heart to heart. Then she slipped quickly away from him.

"I came to wake you, Fal-Kar." Something strange and new was in her voice. "Your sleep was so peaceful . . . I did not like to disturb it with such dreadful tidings. . . . You had been very cold and tired. . . . But the need is urgent!"

She smiled seriously, and patted his great shoulder. He tried to take her back into his arms, but she held herself away.

"Wait until I have told you!" she gasped. "Zen is attacked—beleaguered by strange invaders. A wall of shining spears—a weird, incredible forest of them—has grown up while you slept, outside the Zone. The things—the invaders—are attacking the Zone!"

"Attacking the Zone!" Fal-Kar stepped back in amazement. "How?"

"No one knows. A new life has risen against us, a life of strange and mighty energies. Some force it commands that is tearing down the Zone. We can do nothing to stop it. I told the Six that you might save us. None in Zen can equal the learning of the Kars."

She smiled at him proudly.

"You must come with me to the generators of the Zone. Perhaps you can understand the weapon our enemies are using. I *know* you can!

"The case is desperate, Fal-Kar. Already our generators are strained to the limit of their power; they must soon burn out unless we slow them down. And the attacking forces, whatever they may be, are growing steadily stronger. Very soon, unless *you* will aid us, the Zone must fall.

"Here is your sky-sled. I have repaired it for you. Come with me!"

"But I can't!" cried Fal-Kar. "I must lose no time; already I have been delayed too long. I came for a radium cell. The

ancient work of the Kars is done, but for power to set flaming the new sun of atomic energy. I came to get one of the great radium cells that maintain the Zone; I must take it to my father."

"You can't do that," insisted Del-Ara. "You can't leave Zen. The city is walled with living spears, guarded by flying crystals of the new cold life. Nor will the Six let you take one of the precious cells. Every one is required to maintain the Zone against the attack of the invaders. And you *must* help!"

"Very well; I shall try. But I must soon obtain a cell and take it to our tower. My father is waiting there, alone."

"This way. The sky-sled."

Eagerly Del-Ara took his arm.

The bright torpedo-shape of the rocket-vehicle, repaired, lay on the roof behind a copse of shrubbery. They slipped into its glistening hull. Fal-Kar stepped again to the familiar controls; screaming motors jetted golden flame and the trim flyer lifted above the roof-garden.

"That way." Del-Ara pointed with a smooth white arm. "The Tower of the Zone. The generators are on its roof."

The lofty, many-hued buildings and the broad bright gardens of Zen dropped beneath them, as the sky-sled soared toward the arching green rays of the shimmering Zone. Cold stars burned through the frail, supernal wonder of it; the dark rocks and snow-fields of the ice world beyond were visible through it, weirdly tinged with green.

Now Fal-Kar could see the invaders. He let the sky-sled drift aimlessly while he stared at them.

A towering wall of crystal swords rimmed the city, safely back from the Zone. A tangled forest of colossal keen blades, violet and ice-blue, rising in an impenetrable barrier. A thick mass of gleaming, frosty crystalline spokes, moving, advancing, thrusting out new blades with uncanny abruptness.

Above that titanic luminescent jungle flew radiant arrows of violet-blue, darting, wheeling, spinning. They dived at the fragile Zone, arched swiftly above it, sportive, mocking, waiting. . . . The invading new life triumphant, but waiting for the inevitable death of the old.

"Phantoms . . . phantoms of the forest . . . waiting for the last of us to die. . . ."

Fal-Kar breathed the words through clenched teeth, and shuddered as he stood at the steering-dial.

Del-Ara cried out suddenly; her small fingers dug into his shoulder.

"The Zone! The Zone! You are too late, Fal-Kar. The Zone has failed!"

Fal-Kar saw that the splendid dome of green radiance above the city appeared suddenly unstable. It was flickering. Great rents came in it, irregular patches of black, that widened and closed and opened again, ever more frequent, ever larger.

SETTING the nose of the flyer toward the central great tower, Fal-Kar opened the rockets wide. Golden fire shrieked back from the exhausts; the sky-sled plunged toward the generators of the Zone.

"Hurry!" urged Del-Ara, strong small fingers sunk into his shoulder. "The invaders are piercing the Zone."

Before them the green wall flickered, faded. From the black sky the stars burst through with new brilliance. The wall of blue-violet spiked forest marched closer across the ghostly ice-plains without. Fal-Kar saw cold, shimmering lances diving at the momentary opening. Then the green dome was whole again; the diving lances of frosty crystal wheeled and darted back, waiting. . . .

"They are generating an interfering wave," muttered Fal-Kar. "When synchronized with the vibrations of the Zone it annihilates them, tears down the barrier. If we are in time, if the generators could be retuned——"

The Zone flickered again.

Moving patches of black came in it, spread. Cold, immutable, the far stars shone through. The bright, spiked forest again crept forward, thrusting out new titanic blades toward the doomed city. And again the flying arrows dived.

A moment the Zone grew stronger. Then it flickered, vanished; mangled ribbons of green light came back, went out. And the Zone was gone.

With a groan of despair, Fal-Kar shut off the driving motors, let the sky-sled wheel above the fallen city.

Cruel cold stars leered down upon naked Zen from a sky gone utterly black. The icy fingers of ultimate winter closed upon the last outpost of man. White snow was frozen from the humid air that had been prisoned under the Zone; its flurries wrapped the darkened necropolis in ghostly shrouds.

The frozen blue-violet wall of the invaders tightened again, an inexorable ring of shimmering, crystal death.

Down upon defenseless gardens rained the flying arrows. They stabbed into the soil, remained standing for moments as titanic, monolithic shafts of chill radiance. Then sharp bright crystalline blades stabbed out from them with crashing abruptness; they grew crazily into fantastic trees of insane and alien life.

Shuddering with horror, Fal-Kar watched the people of Zen, huddling together against the sudden blast of descending cold, crowding vainly into buildings. Bright lances impaled them. Strange blades grew twistedly into buildings after them. . . .

Buildings collapsed before the advancing forest, pushed over by its inexorable mass, their ruins buried under shimmering, spiky tangles.

Zen was overcome with incredible swiftness. For a little time Fal-Kar and Del-Ara watched the movements of the panic-stricken people, struggling desperately, madly, pitifully, to escape a universal doom. But the Zone had been the whole defense of Zen; with it had gone all hope.

Very soon human movement ceased. The lunar life had spread over the city like the flood of a shimmering dark sea; only the shattered wrecks of a few buildings rose above it, like lonely vaults of the departed human race.

Del-Ara's hand relaxed its hard grasp upon Fal-Kar's shoulder.

"The Zone is gone!" she whispered, in strange, shrill tones. "And Zen is dead, for ever. The invaders and the cold have won."

She burst into sobbing, hysterical laughter.

"We are the last alive! The last of man!"

5. *Darkness of Doom*

FAL-KAR drove the sky-sled once more toward the Tower of the Zone. It was a mighty building of metal and bright crystal. Gigantic mechanisms loomed upon its roof, under the dark sky—the generators of the Zone. They were deserted, now, still for ever. Frost had already touched them with ghostly white.

Beside the building had stabbed down one of the blue-violet arrows. From it a tree of mad frozen life had sprung up, shooting out jagged keen blades, palely radiant. And the tide of the crystal sea had flowed against it; the great tower

rose dark and lonely above the eldritch radiance of the lunar jungle.

"The radium cells?" Fal-Kar demanded. "They are in the tower?"

Beside him Del-Ara was laughing wildly, helplessly; she ignored his question.

"Tell me," he repeated. "Where are the radium cells?"

"Why think—why think about them?" she gasped through sobbing laughter. "The cells can do us no good. Zen is gone. The invaders have won. We are the last—*the last!*"

"Stop laughing, Del-Ara! Tell me!"

She was shaking again with hysteria. He seized her slender white shoulder with one great hand, shook her.

"Tell me! You *must* tell me. Zen is gone, but the work of the Kars can yet be finished. I am going to take the cell to our tower, and set the new sun to flaming above the mountain. I am going to end the darkness and the cold and these monsters from the moon."

She looked at him. Madness and fear faded out of her eyes; they were clear again, warmly brown. The trembling of her white body ceased and she drew closer against him.

"Yes," she whispered, "the work of the Kars will yet be finished. And hope for mankind is not gone, while we are alive."

He smiled at her, drew her slim form close as he stood at the controls.

"Brave Del-Ara! We are not conquered. Hope is slender enough, but we shall fight. Where is the cell?"

"In the vault beneath the tower's foundation," she whispered, and added softly, "We shall fight—together. And together we shall die—or live—for mankind!"

Almost vertically, Fal-Kar brought the sky-sled down into the coldly shimmering tangle of jagged crystal growth about the base of the tower. He cut in the bow tubes, and a bellowing rush of flame flared before the rocket vehicle, checking its downward plunge. Like frost before a torch, the alien line was disintegrated by the roaring flame.

The sky-sled came to rest on the little space the blast had cleared. Del-Ara opened the door; the two sprang out.

Cold met them like a palpable barrier; they shrank from it, shivered, gasping for breath in the frigid air. Weird fearful radiance of the dread forest shone upon them. Glittering crystal blades were thrust toward them quickly, closing up the tiny open space.

"This way!" gasped Del-Ara through chattering teeth.

She turned a lever; a massive door opened in the metal wall which had thus far withstood the terrific pressure of the invading forest. Beyond lay a flight of steps. She led the way down, through another thick door, and into a long dim vault that was lined with the square black masses of the precious radium cells.

With an eager cry, Fal-Kar was upon one in an instant, reading the gages to determine its condition, then furiously working to unfasten the connections that held it in place. In moments he had torn it free. Muscles cracked in his mighty body as he lifted it to his shoulders and staggered up the stair, Del-Ara running ahead of him.

THE cell was a burden for four men, yet he reached the upper door with it, white clouds puffing into the frigid air from his laboring lungs. But on the threshold he staggered, stumbled, fell with his precious load to the frosty ground.

The sky-sled was but yards away. Fal-Kar dragged himself to his feet, tugged

at the heavy cell with numb, dead hands.

With silent, fearful quickness, a yard-broad lance of ice-blue glittering crystal stabbed across between the two and the tiny vehicle. Weird violet radiance flickered about them as the swiftly advancing lunar life shut out the ebon, wintry sky.

The heavy cell slipped from Fal-Kar's numb hands. He knew, freezing and exhausted as he was, that he could not lift the priceless thing across this keen-edged barrier.

Then Del-Ara's white form leapt forward ahead of him. With a lithe bound she cleared the titanic menacing blade, and ran into the sky-sled. Fal-Kar saw her touch the controls, and hot golden flame jetted screaming from the reaction motors, fore and aft. Their balanced pressure, forward and backward, held the trembling vehicle stationary, while licking tongues of yellow fire once more devoured the nearest crystal blades.

Warmed a little by the reverberation of the heat that had swept the ragged blade from before him, Fal-Kar lifted the great square mass of the cell again, toiled to the sky-sled with it as Del-Ara shut off the motors. He thrust it aside, fell over, and lay there, gasping, only half aware that the girl was closing the door and sending the vehicle screaming upward.

The glowing red coil of the heater warmed him; he was soon beside her at the controls.

Over a strange world they flew, toward the mountain laboratory.

The invading lunar life had spread indeed with fearful swiftness. Frosty, rugged deserts, flat ice-plains, grim black mountains—all had been conquered by it. Fal-Kar saw beneath him a new and unfamiliar world, a-shimmer with the blue-violet light of the weird invaders.

Indeed the life of cold had conquered. Beneath the frozen dark dome of the immutable sky, the radiant crystal forest stretched from horizon to black horizon. Zen was gone; the last human city—dead! Winter and darkness and the weird spawn of the cold moon held the planet in their inevitable grasp.

In that strange landscape covered with gleaming tangles of blue-violet spikes, Fal-Kar scarcely recognized the mountain of his fathers. It was buried to the summit with the alien blades—a mountain of frozen, blue-violet flame.

Above it, against the hard black sky, wheeled by thousands the shining lances, the flying crystal arrows of the invading life. In a bright, fearful swarm, they swirled about the ancient red tower of the Kars.

The sky-sled swept down; and Fal-Kar's heart constricted with alarm.

The tower was dark. The sea of glittering jungle had broken over it; only the high dome of Tro-Kar's observatory remained completely visible. And the wide crystal windows of the upper stories were shattered; stabbing blades had entered them.

The invaders, Fal-Kar knew with fatal, numbing certainty, had broken into the tower, destroyed his father, seized the great work of the Kars. The darkness of those broken windows was the darkness of doom; the darkness of victorious and unending winter now reigning unbroken throughout the planet.

6. *The Conquest of Cold.*

NUMBED with the shock of grief and horror, Fal-Kar stared down at the dark ancient tower of his fathers, while his hands automatically kept the aimless sky-sled wheeling. In silent sympathy Del-Ara moved close to his side; her small hand caressed his shoulder tenderly.

The bright uncanny forest grew higher about the tower; jagged keen blades were thrust from the upper windows, as if they had found some dread nourishment within.

Fal-Kar shook himself suddenly, burst from his grief-stricken daze into desperate activity.

"We still live!" he cried. "And the equipment in the tower was not delicate; it may not be completely wrecked. We must not surrender now! The Kars can not fail—so my father always said. And we must not fail him."

He drove the sky-sled downward, plunging recklessly into the pale, glistening jungle of lunar life. Once more he cut in the bow tubes, and enormous hungry tongues of golden fire licked from the motors at either end of the narrow hull, consuming the crystalline growth.

Held between two terrific forces that struggled to move her in opposite directions, the frail vehicle trembled and spun. With cold, deadly efficiency, Fal-Kar fought the controls. He made the sky-sled perform feats for which it had never been designed. He bathed the mountain-top and the dark tower in flame until they were clear of the eldritch lunar invaders. He played roaring torrents of flame through the broken windows. Then he landed at the base of the tower.

Del-Ara flung open the door; and the air of the ice world struck them again, like a frigid wall. Fal-Kar lifted the huge cell and staggered toward the tower's entrance. Frost crackled beneath his feet. Stars burned cold and distant in the ebon sky; and strange lights flickered over the snow, from the creeping lunar forest that was swiftly closing up the wound cut by the searing rocket jets.

Within the great door they found Tro-Kar.

The invaders must have fed upon him, for certain elements had been robbed from his collapsed and distorted body. Jagged blades had cut it to red ribbons; now it was frozen to the hardness of iron.

But the remains of one hand were still locked about the ends of two insulated cables, which ran up the stairs in the direction of the laboratory. At a glance Fal-Kar knew them to be the power leads of the atomic generator.

"My father is dead," he whispered slowly. "But before he died he had all prepared for us. He even brought the ends of the cables down here, ready to attach to the new cell. Always he told me that the Kars do not fail."

A moment longer he stood above the red, stiff corpse. Leaden ache of cold was seizing his fingers, creeping up his arms. The frosty air seemed to burn his lungs; he could hardly breathe. He was shivering, and his skin felt like stiff, dead armor, contracting mercilessly about him.

With numb hands he began to fasten the cables to the great cell.

Del-Ara, looking from the door into the violet-lit night of the ice world, gasped something voicelessly, and made an imperative gesture of warning. She tried to close the massive valve.

A crystalline, glistening blade burst the heavy door open again, flinging the girl back against the wall, where she lay quietly. The keen edge of it grazed Fal-Kar's breast. Thick blood started sluggishly and froze on his golden-brown fur. He was shaken by a chill of unendurable cold that seemed to pierce his very heart. His hands were useless; he was suddenly blind.

He bent under the titanic bright spear that had stabbed into the room. With stiff, aching lips he found the last connection, and tightened it with his teeth. Then he slumped down beside the thick black radium cell. . . .

Fal-Kar was conscious again; he stretched his painful body, and sat up. He saw that he was still in the tower of the Kars, just within the great open valve, beside the squat bulk of the radium cell. And he was warm again.

Beyond the open door was a square of sky, not black as it had been for centuries of centuries, but deeply and freshly blue. Strong light streamed through the opening, and a delightful warm breeze blew upon him. He sat there until he heard a glad laugh, and looked up to see Del-Ara in the doorway, framed against the new blue of the sky, slenderly lovely.

"Come, Fal-Kar," she cried joyously. "See your new sun! It flames above the tower. And the invaders are gone!"

She ran to him solicitously as he got to his feet. Arm in arm they walked out upon the summit of the mountain, at the base of the ancient red tower. Upward they looked, into a sky that was softly blue.

Above the massive tower reached up a pallid finger of radiance, a ray of pure force, vibrant, a little unsteady, almost invisible but faintly green. And far above, at the end of the greenish shaft, burned a huge warm orb of golden light, the globe of the new sun, whose fires were fed upon illimitable atomic energy.

The eldritch gleaming tangles of the lunar life were gone from the broad valleys and vast plains below the mountain. White frost was melting to reveal streaks of rich black soil; silvery streams, ice-locked for millenia, were flowing again.

Arm linked in arm, Fal-Kar and Del-Ara stood on the crest of the mountain, looking down on a world now all their own.

"Now the naked soil is black and the streams are swift muddy torrents," Fal-Kar said at last. "But soon green will cover the black, and the cleared streams will be bordered with flowers. Winter and night are conquered. Spring and dawn are here again, to endure for ever."

"Dawn and spring," softly murmured Del-Ara. "For the world. For us. And our children."

Too Late

By ALFRED I. TOOKE

What ghosts are these that haunt me? Not the shades
  Of those who long have passed beyond the veil,
And finding in eternity a gap,
  Slipped back again to Time's elusive trail.

They are my own ghosts, ever-present shades
  Of what I might have been. They lie in wait,
To point, in sorrow, at the bygone years,
  And haunt me with their cry: "Too late! Too late!"

"It came screaming down out of the sky."

A Phantom in the Sky

By DALE CLARK

A strange tale of an aviator's weird experience in a doomed airplane that fell from the sky

IT WAS nine o'clock when the doctor's telephone rang.

The doctor uttered a little groan as he put out his hand to the instrument. He was not a young man, and he was very tired. After being out all day with a confinement case in the country, he dreaded a night call. The mountain roads were greasy with cold spring rain.

"You'd better say you can't come," his wife said. "You tell them to call Doctor Evarts, John."

"Hello!" the doctor said.

The voice on the wire leaped and crackled, making a sharp, tinny sound which the doctor's wife could hear.

"All right," the doctor said. "Yes. Right away. Of course."

His wife looked at him with big, reproachful eyes.

"That was Evarts talking," the doctor told her. "There's been an accident, a plane crash-up on Turkey Ridge. He doesn't know how many are hurt or killed. It's probably a two-man job, though."

He got up stiffly and heavily, went into the hall, and put on his overcoat. Silently, the woman lifted the percolator from the table and drained its contents into a thermos flask. She threw a shawl over her head and waddled into the yard and watched the doctor back his muddy little coupé from the garage. She handed the thermos flask through the window.

"Now, don't you drive too fast, John," she said.

The doctor drove as rapidly as he dared. The air was full of a cold mist against which the windshield wiper tended a little black arc of glass. The doctor saw, through the pale, cloudy diffusion of the headlight fan wavering upon the tarnished clay of the road, the slithering track left by Doctor Evarts' machine. Once he glimpsed the red dot of a tail-lamp ahead.

The motor coughed and sputtered on the grades, and the tire chains made a paddling sound in the night.

HE STOPPED the car beside a stake-and-runner pasture fence. He crawled over the wet, slippery rail and set off through the cold steam of mist toward a flare of murky torches in the field. He walked fast, stumbling a little with the weight of his instrument bag, and breathing heavily. The air tasted raw in his nostrils and throat; the mist powdered his shaggy coat with tiny drops. The sod was soaked soft, and made a plopping, squishy sound under his large shoes.

A line of men—lean, gaunt mountain men—held drafty pine torches at a little distance from the wreck and its pungent smell of spilt gasoline. The torches flung a red, resinous light.

The doctor looked at the plane. It resembled a squashed beetle. The steel body was badly smashed, but he could see that it had been one of the big, cabin flyers.

Doctor Evarts stood there with a flashlight in his hand, probing its cold white ray into the ruin of the cabin. He was a keen, brisk young man.

The old doctor glanced at the corpses laid in a careful straight row beside the plane. The bodies looked slack and sacklike, with stiff limbs that were somehow shapeless. One of the mountain men was trying to fold the hands upon the chests.

"Let them be, Jed," Doctor Evarts said. "I'll have to go through their pockets, you know."

He was the local coroner.

The old doctor tried not to look at the faces, convulsed with the horror of violence, faces smeared bloodily with contused blood at mouth and nose. They were masks frozen and clotted with the fear of the Angel of Death.

"All?" he asked.

"Oh. Hello, Bryant." The young coroner turned around. "Yes, every one of them. I'm sorry I got you out. I didn't know, of course."

"I suppose there's nothing we can do, now."

"No, there's nothing anyone can do." Doctor Evarts looked up into Bryant's large, tired face, wet with the haze. "You might as well go on home, sir," he said gently. "The rest is just a routine job for me."

"If you don't mind, I will. I've had a hard day."

The old doctor turned away. He had gone a few steps when the man who had been bending over the bodies came up and held a torch past his face.

"It's horrid," the man said. "It's like a judgment by Gawd A'mighty."

"Yes, it's a frightful thing."

"We heard it over beyond the creek," the man muttered. "It came screaming down like the devil whistling out of the sky, and next it smashed as loud as thunder."

"Yes," the old doctor said. "It undoubtedly fell from thousands of feet—to smash like that, steel broken like matchwood."

"It's horrid." The man looked into the night, beyond the little cave of light scooped by the torches. "It makes a man think of things, even if he don't believe in such as them. I could give you a light to the car, Doc."

Bryant smiled. "I don't think I'll see any ghosts, Jep."

But he took the torch in his own hand and went on slowly, wearily, watching for puddles on the wet sod. He had got nearly to the fence when a glitter on the ground refracted the dull, piny light. What he saw was the nickeled clasp of a black leather briefcase.

It was a strange enough article to find in that pasture, and the doctor made no doubt it had fallen from the plane. He paused, holding the briefcase in his hand, looking back at the wreck. The wind was coming up, with a sullen swish of rain in it that promised more slippery grease upon the road.

He shook his head. "I could as well give it to Evarts in town," he decided aloud.

He flung the torch into a roadside pool, where it expired with a hiss, and dropped the briefcase and his own bag into the seat of the coupé. When he had switched up the dome light the doctor poured a half-pint of steaming coffee from the flask and drank with a slow, grateful sigh. He noticed, then, that the clasp of the case was undone and that a sheaf of papers written upon in a strong, large hand, had spilled onto the seat.

He picked up the sheets and patted them into order with his careful, surgeon's hands. His eye caught the legend across the upper margin of the first page:

"To Whom it May Concern——"

These words, in a rapid, angular, and almost illegible scrawl, had been placed in sharp contrast with the lower, neatly formed characters; placed, he concluded, as an after-thought, for a line had been drawn roughly through an earlier heading, *"Dear H. G.——"*

To whom it may concern—this was not, therefore, a privileged communication.

The doctor glanced down the page; he frowned, and hesitated, and at last polished his eye-glasses and looked through them upon what was written:

"SAFELY aboard! But what a struggle! I darned near missed the plane, thanks to a most mysterious young man who is now making me frightfully uncomfortable both in body and in mind.

"I was standing under the awning of the Charterse Hotel when I first saw him. The doorman had just called my cab, and I was waiting there with my briefcase in my hand—my luggage had gone on the airport bus an hour before—looking out into the bright glare of the street at a clock on the corner. I had barely forty minutes in which to catch my plane. Then this chap darted past me down the rubber matting to the curb.

"My cab whirled up. And he, as cool as ice, calmly stepped into it, said some-

thing to the driver, and away shot the taxi from under my nose!

"It was pure cheek—in fact, a piece of damned insolence. Of course he knew that was my cab. He couldn't possibly not have known it. He had followed me through the hotel door, you see. What made it a good deal worse, the taxi happened to be the last out of the stand.

"I saw myself flunking that business in Washington tonight. I yelled something to the doorman, who ran out from under the awning, tooting his little nickeled whistle in the most emphatic way. Well, but there was no such thing as a cruising cab in sight.

"I was frantic. The third red light had stopped the traffic when I did one of those simple but inspired things a man will think of when he's absolutely up against it. I ran out into the street and yanked open the door of the first taxi I came to. The gentleman inside it acted very decently; I told him what a devil of a mess I was in, and he surrendered the machine to me. I showed the cabby a five and told him I shouldn't ask any change out of it if he could turn the trick.

"It was narrow. I dashed up to the plane just as the last pieces of luggage were being stowed in by the guard. The motor was turning over and the pilot sat at the controls. And there, squarely in front of me, looking into the cabin, was this young fellow.

"He barred the door, and I tapped his shoulder—for his back was toward me—and said:

" 'If you will step aside, please!' Rather a sharp tone—naturally enough.

"He didn't stir. 'This plane isn't going to Washington, you know,' he said quietly.

"Now, how did he know where I was going? I had my ticket ready in my hand. But he hadn't turned, or even glanced in my direction.

"I was taken aback. I appealed to the guard, who had just closed the luggage compartment door.

" 'Isn't this the Washington plane?' I asked.

" 'Sure,' the guard said, tearing a snip from my ticket. 'You'd better get into her, too.'

"I spoke to the fellow ahead of me in a pretty keen voice. 'Now, if you're satisfied——'

"He stepped up into the cabin without a word of apology or explanation for this deucedly queer behavior of his, and I followed.

"The plane was very full, as it always is when Congress has been called into session; the crowd was one of special correspondents and lobbyists, to say nothing of the more ambitious sort of job-seekers. They had taken every seat except the double chair at the back wall. And here this fellow had bunched himself down, his elbows and knees angled out in a way that took up a good deal more space than his fare entitled him to use. He had a soft hat pulled down over his face.

"I waited a minute, thinking he'd make a move to accommodate me; but no. So I said, 'I'm afraid I'll have to share this seat with you, if you don't mind.'

"He didn't look up. 'But I do mind,' he said in a chilly way.

"I looked once more around the cabin. 'I don't want your company any more than you want mine,' I snapped, 'but if you'll take the trouble to look, you'll see there's no other place. It just can't be helped.'

" 'Why don't you take the six o'clock machine, then?' he asked.

"All this was preposterous. And he

brought it off in such a firm, quiet, sure manner! It was impossible to think that he had been drinking. He hadn't even that excuse, and yet I didn't feel righteously angry with him, either. It struck me that he was a bit off.

" 'By the way,' I said, 'this is the Washington plane, and if you didn't know that, quite likely you're on the wrong machine yourself.'

" 'I don't expect to go that far,' he muttered.

"The plane was starting now. I jammed myself down into the seat, or rather into the small fraction of it he wasn't already occupying, and looked out the window, and then for the first time I saw the fellow's face. And I knew that face. It was the face of Robin Bates!

"It gave me a nasty start—for, of course, he couldn't be. . . . I had seen him, Robin, killed. It happened in the summer of 1918; we were in a dog-fight over the lines, and his crate took fire and went down in a frightful hell of flame and smoke, to crash behind the German trenches.

"But here was his face. Fifteen years, you will say—I could forget. Yes, but Robin had been my very best friend, and in a way more than a friend, though I had known him only a few weeks when it happened. Men 'got' to each other in a hurry in 1918. . . . I have to tell you a bit more. I don't want to make myself out any sort of hero, but I had the luck to get onto the tail of a Fokker which was on Bates' tail, and he thought I'd saved his life. 'I'll do as much for you some day,' he vowed. And he would have, too, if he'd had the chance. Meanwhile he made himself practically my slave.

"Oh, I couldn't have been mistaken! This lad was Robin Bates all over again, in a positively uncanny way. I'll tell you how strongly it impressed me. You've heard stories about men being shot down over there, and then living through it after all, only without any memory of things? I had a feeling that something of the sort had happened—that he *was* my friend. I touched his sleeve.

" 'You're not Robin Bates, are you?' I blurted.

" 'No,' he said. And confound it, the very voice was Robin's, and I felt no end of a fool for not having recognized it before.

" 'You weren't in the War, were you?' I persisted, though I knew it was silly to ask. The lad wasn't a day over nineteen —he had been in kindergarten when the Armistice was signed.

" 'War!' he muttered. 'War? No. Nothing like that.'

" 'Anyway,' I said, 'you must be related to someone I used to know. The resemblance is extraordinary. Are you related to a Bates family?'

"He shook his head. 'My name's Carter,' he said briefly.

"He wasn't to be persuaded to talk, you see. The glummest and least sociable person alive—to say nothing of his boorishness about the cab and this seat. He's the very opposite of Robin in every way, except, as I say, for the physical resemblance. I look at him now, and it is difficult for me to believe that he *isn't* Robin. It's uncanny. It's almost enough to make one believe in reincarnation or some of those things.

"ALMOST extraordinary thing has happened.

"We got out of the plane at Louisville —there is a twenty-minute stop, connecting with a mail train—and walked into a lunchroom on the airport grounds. Carter and I sat at the same table. I must say that he was not exactly unfriendly, but not easy to talk to. I tried everything,

and I should say that he has read none of the modern books, knows nothing of politics, and has not picked up a newspaper in years.

"Well, near the end of the meal—my meal, for he had eaten nothing, merely toyed with his food—he clumsily upset a catsup bottle over my hand and sleeve. That seemed to wake him up a bit. He was very profuse in apologizing, and insisted upon dabbing up the worst of the mess with his handkerchief.

" 'There's a washroom over behind the booths,' he said. 'You'll have time to clean up a bit. I'm most awfully sorry.'

"I walked into the washroom and took off my coat. Before I had quite cleansed the shirt cuff, I heard the motor gun up in the yard; I put on the coat again and reached for the door. The infernal thing had come locked on the outside.

"I hadn't a moment to lose. I threw up the window and leaped through it and ran to the plane. They had already stowed the mail, and everyone else was in place. The guard asked for my ticket—and I couldn't find my wallet. I thought I'd dropped it in the washroom, and I told the man so.

"He put on an official frown, which became a scowl when we didn't find any purse in the washroom. Someone had picked my pocket. Well, I had an idea.

" 'There's a chap inside who'll tell you I came in on this ship, and that I had a ticket through to Washington,' I said, and beckoned Carter to the door of the plane.

"What happened then quite floored me. He told the guard, in the most innocent fashion possible, that he had never laid eyes on me before! I don't know what I should have done if the manager of the airport hadn't come up. He knew me—for I've traveled the line a good deal—and was willing to take my check for the rest of the passage.

"I have found a seat, at last, up in the front of the cabin—a passenger got out at Louisville. It seems he had an attack of air nerves; we have been running into an occasional fog bank. (The flying forecast is fair, so it probably won't last long.)

"I glanced back at Carter a moment ago. He looks very young and lonely, there in that big seat.

"I should despise him, but on the contrary, I feel sorry for the kid. Indeed, I rather like him. I suppose that is because of his resemblance to poor Robin Bates.

"I am going back to talk to Carter. It is queer, but I feel a distinct pull toward the chap, as if he were silently calling me. He has acted like a boor all along, but not in a boorish, mean, nasty way. I almost suspect that he isn't responsible for the things he does.

"I look into his empty eyes, and have a feeling that he is but the husk and rind of a man. Something is lacking. The mind, perhaps. Or the soul. . . . One gets the idea that he is wrapped up in a kind of dream, that he is quite alone in a world which he can't at all understand. He seems strangely and hopelessly baffled.

"I am going to ask him some questions. You see, I have a theory to explain the chap:

"I don't know anything about Robin Bates' family. But his father may have been a rounder. He might have had an illegitimate son. That would account for the resemblance.

"THIS is maddening!

"I've just talked to Carter. 'We might as well get acquainted,' I said. 'My name is Pulver. William Pulver.'

"It wasn't much use. He listened to me, vaguely; he was thinking of some-

thing else. I felt rebuffed, and a little hurt, too.

" 'You've a down on me,' I said to him then. 'I'm sorry about that. I am, indeed. But I won't trouble you any more.'

"He did a strange thing. He leaned toward me and put his two fingers on my knee. Ah! that was Robin's way, his gesture when he wanted to be awfully emphatic about something.

" 'Oh, no!' he said earnestly. 'I've taken quite a chunk of liking to you from the start, really!'

"A chunk of liking! Robin used to say that. I never heard anyone else use the phrase. It gave me a quick, qualmy start.

" 'But you didn't want me to sit with you,' I said. 'Why?'

" 'I'm blessed if I know,' he said. 'I just had the feeling.'

"And I asked, 'What sort of feeling?'

"He shivered. 'I don't know. A feeling. I don't remember any more.'

"Pitiable! So blankly helpless! It made me sad, it was so like talking to a lost child.

"Carter must have seen the softening of my face, for he took that moment to draw my wallet from his pocket.

" 'I'm sorry about this,' he said. 'It seemed the thing to do, at the time. You'll find your money safe in it, and your ticket. I hope they'll refund your check.'

"I took the wallet, and got up stiffly, and left him.

"You see the game? Of course, his 'feelings' are the baldest fakery. He locked me in that washroom, and I'd never have seen the wallet again if I hadn't got on the plane in spite of all! I dare say he leaped into my cab after picking a pocket in the hotel: that was why he didn't want me on this plane in the first place.

"A thief! Wearing Robin's face, using his voice, his mannerisms, his personality!

"We are getting into a regular soup of fog.

"It's horrible! He's so like Robin!

"I JUST looked back at Carter. He sat there, all twisted, his face afire in a terrible way, his hand clawing.

"I knew what he was doing. I've done it myself. He was fighting the joy-stick of one of those old army crates—fighting it, and trying to kick her nose up! What does that boy know about a 1918 crate?

"I stared out the window. It freezes my blood to write this. We've just skimmed the rim of a mountain ledge. I had only a fleeting glimpse, but I couldn't be mistaken: I've had too many tricks at the stick. There was the ledge, and there was the perfectly natural thing which Carter did: trying to boost the ship, just as you will brake down your foot on the floorboard of a car another man is driving, if he comes up too fast on a light. . . . But how did Carter know? He couldn't possibly have seen that ledge. Not in time. But he knew. I saw it in his face.

"I don't mean that he was afraid. He wasn't. Quite the contrary. His face glowed with a terrible knowledge, as if Death had brushed his shoulder and the touch of Death somehow brought him all alive.

"He is looking at me.

"I am beginning to have an idea about Carter——

"Fog. There is a blanket of fog, and though we have climbed steadily from that ledge, we do not find a ceiling to it. The higher we go, the colder—and there is plenty of the stuff freezing on the wings. A flyer knows the weight and drag of it on the ship.

"The pilot can't think of a forced

landing on the mountains in the fog. He has to climb.

"I HAVE gone back to Carter.

" 'Where did you do your flying?' I asked him.

"He shakes his head, he says nothing, he watches me write. He can't read this, it has come on dark, and we are not showing a light inside to wall in the fog against any beacon the pilot might find. Anyway, it is as if the act of putting words on paper has no meaning to Carter.

" 'You've been up before,' I said. 'You've flown quite a bit?'

" 'I don't know,' he said. 'I can't remember.'

" 'Was it so long ago?' I asked.

"Carter gave a little sigh and passed his hand over his face.

"His face! How plainly I see it. Something there is, not a halo the eye can see, but a dark light under the flesh!

" 'You know,' he said, 'you remind me of someone I once knew.'

" 'Who?' I asked, and my blood came throbbing into my temples.

" 'I can't think,' he said.

" 'Was he a soldier?' I asked.

"He did not say anything.

"A bad pocket!

"The plane went like a rocket. She went screaming and twisting on her tail, shivering and groaning, with a sound as of hammers beating on her as she fell.

"And I was afraid. It was horrible; not only that I didn't want to die—but to go without a fight, without a chance, in this cabin like a coffin reeling down the sky!

"And Carter. Death was near, and he seemed to feel that. He came all awake, all alive, with the glow leaping up in him like fire behind the dark flesh. I had the notion that the flesh was dissolving in the flame of him.

" 'You don't have to be afraid,' he said. 'It is very easy.'

"He put his hand on my arm. The fingers were immensely strong. They seemed to lift me out of my seat. I had the sensation of floating away from the plane. I could no longer feel the pitch and fall of the ship.

" 'It is not the least bit hard,' he said, and he smiled very sweetly.

"I believed him. I ceased to be afraid in the moment that I felt his hand upon my sleeve.

"IT IS terribly important that I throw this out the window at the last. You may say that the plane simply leveled out of the pocket when Carter took my arm. But I did not feel her, and the wrench was like to tear the struts out of her. I know by the way she flies. We are done for. I know—it is not just the fog and the cold and the feel of the ship: it is Carter and the warm shining behind his face.

"I think of Robin. If I had missed the plane, if I had waited for the six o'clock, if that official had refused my check at Louisville——

"Do you see? It would have been a way of the man Carter keeping Robin's promise.

" 'Robin!' I said to him.

"He did not say anything.

"What does a name mean? Here——

"I hear a cracked sound shivering.

"Why do they scream?

"His hand. made let go. write this the last.

"Shrill and twist, all

roar
down grind
I
Robin——"

THE old doctor put the last, hugely scrawled sheets upon the first, neat ones. He took off his eye-glasses and placed them with an exact and deliberate care inside his coat. He got out of the car, tucking the briefcase under his arm. He slopped across the dark field.

The man Jed was crossing the hands over the quiet chests.

The old doctor asked, "Did you identify them all?"

The coroner straightened his back; he had been stuffing papers into his own kit. "Why—oh, Bryant, you here again? Yes, I've got them ticketed," he said with a trace of professional satisfaction. "They all had purses, billfolds, old envelopes—one thing and another."

Doctor Bryant gave him the briefcase.

"This belongs to one of them. William Pulver?"

"Come here," Evarts said. He took the old doctor's arm. "He looks peaceful, doesn't he? Curious. There isn't a bruise on him. I dare say his heart failed on the way down. Maybe before."

"He seems to mention another chap," the old doctor said. "A man named Carter?"

"There wasn't anyone of that name in the plane."

"Or Bates? Robin Bates?"

"No. We found a man named Baynes," the coroner said.

The old doctor looked at the plane. Inside his big, shaggy coat his body made a little, quick shiver.

"I don't suppose anyone could have jumped from it?"

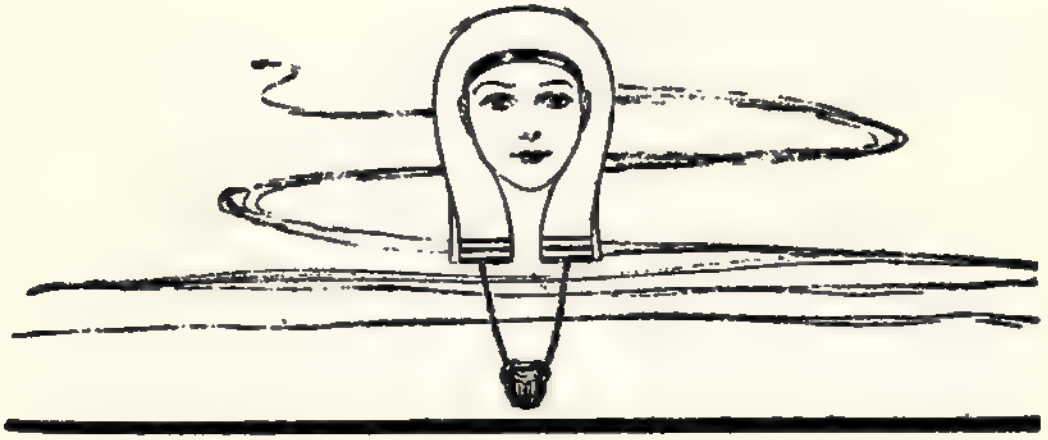
"Impossible. Not from a plane of this type, in midair," said Evarts. "I happen to be posted on that—I've a brother in commercial flying."

"He would have been a young man," the old doctor suggested. "Bates, I mean. A lad of nineteen, or thereabouts."

"No," said the coroner. "There was no such person in the ship."

"Well. That settles it, I suppose."

The doctor walked away across the pasture. He saw the mist go past him in wind-driven tatters and he listened to the suck and squish under his heels in the soft, wet sod. There was no other sight or sound in the night, only a vague feeling of unseen men passing and repassing in the silence and rain.



Rogues in the House

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

A tale to make the blood tingle—the story of a barbarian soldier of fortune and a squatting monstrosity that sat in the chambers of death in the house of the wizard Nabonidus

"One fled, one dead, one sleeping in a golden bed."—Old Rime.

AT A COURT festival, Nabonidus, the Red Priest, who was the real ruler of the city, touched Murilo, the young aristocrat, courteously on the arm. Murilo turned to meet the priest's enigmatic gaze, and to wonder at the hidden meaning therein. No words passed between them, but Nabonidus bowed and handed Murilo a small gold cask. The young nobleman, knowing that Nabonidus did nothing without reason, excused himself at the first opportunity and returned hastily to his chamber. There he opened the cask and found within a human ear, which he recognized by a peculiar scar upon it. He broke into a profuse sweat, and was no longer in doubt about the meaning in the Red Priest's glance.

But Murilo, for all his scented black curls and foppish apparel, was no weakling to bend his neck to the knife without a struggle. He did not know whether Nabonidus was merely playing with him, or giving him a chance to go into voluntary exile, but the fact that he was still alive and at liberty proved that he was to be given at least a few hours, probably for meditation. But he needed no meditation for decision; what he needed was a tool. And Fate furnished that tool, working among the dives and brothels of the squalid quarters even while the young nobleman shivered and pondered in the part of the city occupied by the purple-towered marble and ivory palaces of the aristocracy.

There was a priest of Anu whose temple, rising at the fringe of the slums district, was the scene of more than devotions. The priest was fat and full-fed, and he was at once a fence for stolen articles and a spy for the police. He worked a thriving trade both ways, because the district on which he bordered was The Maze, a tangle of muddy winding alleys and sordid dens, frequented by the boldest thieves in the kingdom. Daring above all were a Gunderman deserter from the mercenaries and a barbaric Cimmerian. Because of the priest of Anu, the Gunderman was taken and hanged in the market-square. But the Cimmerian fled, and learning in devious ways of the priest's treachery, he entered the temple of Anu by night, and cut off the priest's head. There followed a great turmoil in the city, but search for the killer proved fruitless until his punk betrayed him to the authorities, and led a captain of the guard and his squad to the hidden chamber where the barbarian lay drunk.

Waking to stupefied but ferocious life when they seized him, he disemboweled the captain, burst through his assailants and would have escaped, but for the liquor that still clouded his senses. Bewildered and half blinded, he missed the open door in his headlong flight, and dashed his head against the stone wall so terrifically that he knocked himself sense-

"He dropped her with great accuracy into a cesspool."

less. When he came to, he was in the strongest dungeon in the city, shackled to the wall with chains not even his barbaric thews could break.

To this cell came Murilo, masked and wrapped in a wide black cloak. The Cimmerian surveyed him with interest, thinking him the executioner sent to dispatch him. Murilo set him at rights, and regarded him with no less interest. Even in the dim light of the dungeon, with his limbs loaded with chains, the primitive power of the man was evident. His mighty body and thick-muscled limbs combined the strength of a grizzly with the quickness of a panther. Under his tangled black mane his blue eyes blazed with unquenchable savagery.

"Would you like to live?" asked Murilo. The barbarian grunted, new interest glinting in his eyes.

"If I arrange for your escape will you

do a favor for me?" the aristocrat asked.

The Cimmerian did not speak, but the intentness of his gaze answered for him.

"I want you to kill a man for me."

"Whom?"

Murilo's voice sank to a whisper. "Nabonidus, the king's priest!"

The Cimmerian showed no sign of surprize or perturbation. He had none of the fear or reverence for authority that civilization instills in men. King or beggar, it was all one to him. Nor did he ask why Murilo had come to him, when the quarters were full of cutthroats outside prisons.

"When am I to escape?" he demanded.

"Within the hour. There is but one guard in this part of the dungeon at night. He can be bribed; he *has* been bribed. See, here are the keys to your chains. I'll remove them, and after I have been gone an hour, the guard, Athicus, will unlock the door to your cell. You will bind him with strips torn from your tunic; so when he is found, the authorities will think you were rescued from the outside, and will not suspect him. Go at once to the house of the Red Priest, and kill him. Then go to the Rats' Den, where a man will meet you and give you a pouch of gold and a horse. With those you can escape from the city and flee the country."

"Take off these cursed chains now," demanded the Cimmerian. "And have the guard bring me food. By Crom, I have lived on moldy bread and water for a whole day and I am nigh to famishing."

"It shall be done; but remember—you are not to escape until I have had time to reach my house."

Freed of his chains, the barbarian stood up and stretched his heavy arms, enormous in the gloom of the dungeon. Murilo again felt that if any man in the world could accomplish the task he had set, this Cimmerian could. With a few repeated instructions he left the prison, first directing Athicus to take a platter of beef and ale in to the prisoner. He knew he could trust the guard, not only because of the money he had paid, but also because of certain information he possessed regarding the man.

WHEN he returned to his chamber, Murilo was in full control of his fears. Nabonidus would strike through the king—of that he was certain. And since the royal guardsmen were not knocking at his door, it was as certain that the priest had said nothing to the king, so far. Tomorrow he would speak, beyond a doubt—if he lived to see tomorrow.

Murilo believed the Cimmerian would keep faith with him. Whether the man would be able to carry out his purpose remained to be seen. Men had attempted to assassinate the Red Priest before, and they had died in hideous and nameless ways. But they had been products of the cities of men, lacking the wolfish instincts of the barbarian. The instant that Murilo, turning the gold cask with its severed ear in his hands, had learned through his secret channels that the Cimmerian had been captured, he had seen a solution of his problem.

In his chamber again, he drank a toast to the man, whose name was Conan, and to his success that night. And while he was drinking, one of his spies brought him the news that Athicus had been arrested and thrown into prison. The Cimmerian had not escaped.

Murilo felt his blood turn to ice again. He could see in this twist of fate only the sinister hand of Nabonidus, and an eery obsession began to grow on him that the Red Priest was more than human—a sorcerer who read the minds of his victims and pulled strings on which they danced like puppets. With despair came despera-

tion. Girding a sword beneath his black cloak, he left his house by a hidden way, and hurried through the deserted streets. It was just at midnight when he came to the house of Nabonidus, looming blackly among the walled gardens that separated it from the surrounding estates.

The wall was high but not impossible to negotiate. Nabonidus did not put his trust in mere barriers of stone. It was what was inside the wall that was to be feared. What these things were Murilo did not know precisely. He knew there was at least a huge savage dog that roamed the gardens and had on occasion torn an intruder to pieces as a hound rends a rabbit. What else there might be he did not care to conjecture. Men who had been allowed to enter the house on brief, legitimate business, reported that Nabonidus dwelt among rich furnishings, yet simply, attended by a surprizingly small number of servants. Indeed, they mentioned only one as having been visible—a tall silent man called Joka. Some one else, presumably a slave, had been heard moving about in the recesses of the house, but this person no one had ever seen. The greatest mystery of that mysterious house was Nabonidus himself, whose power of intrigue and grasp on international politics had made him the strongest man in the kingdom. People, chancellor and king moved puppet-like on the strings he worked.

Murilo scaled the wall and dropped down into the gardens, which were expanses of shadow, darkened by clumps of shrubbery and waving foliage. No light shone in the windows of the house which loomed so blackly among the trees. The young nobleman stole stealthily yet swiftly through the shrubs. Momentarily he expected to hear the baying of the great dog, and to see its giant body hurtle through the shadows. He doubted the effectiveness of his sword against such an attack, but he did not hesitate. As well die beneath the fangs of a beast as the ax of the headsman.

He stumbled over something bulky and yielding. Bending close in the dim starlight, he made out a limp shape on the ground. It was the dog that guarded the gardens, and it was dead. Its neck was broken and it bore what seemed to be the marks of great fangs. Murilo felt that no human being had done this. The beast had met a monster more savage than itself. Murilo glared nervously at the cryptic masses of bush and shrub; then with a shrug of his shoulders, he approached the silent house.

The first door he tried proved to be unlocked. He entered warily, sword in hand, and found himself in a long shadowy hallway dimly illumined by a light that gleamed through the hangings at the other end. Complete silence hung over the whole house. Murilo glided along the hall and halted to peer through the hangings. He looked into a lighted room, over the windows of which velvet curtains were drawn so closely as to allow no beam to shine through. The room was empty, in so far as human life was concerned, but it had a grisly occupant, nevertheless. In the midst of a wreckage of furniture and torn hangings that told of a fearful struggle, lay the body of a man. The form lay on its belly, but the head was twisted about so that the chin rested behind a shoulder. The features, contorted into an awful grin, seemed to leer at the horrified nobleman.

For the first time that night, Murilo's resolution wavered. He cast an uncertain glance back the way he had come. Then the memory of the headsman's block and ax steeled him, and he crossed the room, swerving to avoid the grinning horror sprawled in its midst. Though he had

never seen the man before, he knew from former descriptions that it was Joka, Nabonidus' saturnine servant.

He peered through a curtained door into a broad circular chamber, banded by a gallery half-way between the polished floor and the lofty ceiling. This chamber was furnished as if for a king. In the midst of it stood an ornate mahogany table, loaded with vessels of wine and rich viands. And Murilo stiffened. In a great chair whose broad back was toward him, he saw a figure whose habiliments were familiar. He glimpsed an arm in a red sleeve resting on the arm of the chair; the head, clad in the familiar scarlet hood of the gown, was bent forward as if in meditation. Just so had Murilo seen Nabonidus sit a hundred times in the royal court.

Cursing the pounding of his own heart, the young nobleman stole across the chamber, sword extended, his whole frame poised for the thrust. His prey did not move, nor seem to hear his cautious advance. Was the Red Priest asleep, or was it a corpse which slumped in that great chair? The length of a single stride separated Murilo from his enemy, when suddenly the man in the chair rose and faced him.

The blood went suddenly from Murilo's features. His sword fell from his fingers and rang on the polished floor. A terrible cry broke from his livid lips; it was followed by the thud of a falling body. Then once more silence reigned over the house of the Red Priest.

2

SHORTLY after Murilo left the dungeon where Conan the Cimmerian was confined, Athicus brought the prisoner a platter of food which included, among other things, a huge joint of beef and a tankard of ale. Conan fell to voraciously, and Athicus made a final round of the cells, to see that all was in order, and that none should witness the pretended prison-break. It was while he was so occupied that a squad of guardsmen marched into the prison and placed him under arrest. Murilo had been mistaken when he assumed this arrest denoted discovery of Conan's planned escape. It was another matter; Athicus had become careless in his dealings with the underworld, and one of his past sins had caught up with him.

Another jailer took his place, a stolid, dependable creature whom no amount of bribery could have shaken from his duty. He was unimaginative, but he had an exalted idea of the importance of his job.

After Athicus had been marched away to be formally arraigned before a magistrate, this jailer made the rounds of the cells as a matter of routine. As he passed that of Conan, his sense of propriety was shocked and outraged to see the prisoner free of his chains, and in the act of gnawing the last shreds of meat from a huge beef-bone. The jailer was so upset that he made the mistake of entering the cell alone, without calling guards from other parts of the prison. It was his first mistake in the line of duty, and his last. Conan brained him with the beef-bone, took his poniard and his keys, and made a leisurely departure. As Murilo had said, only one guard was on duty there at night. The Cimmerian passed himself outside the walls by means of the keys he had taken, and presently emerged into the outer air, as free as if Murilo's plan had been successful.

In the shadows of the prison walls, Conan paused to decide his next course of action. It occurred to him that since he had escaped through his own actions, he owed nothing to Murilo; yet it had been the young nobleman who had re-

moved his chains and had the food sent to him, without either of which his escape would have been impossible. Conan decided that he was indebted to Murilo, and, since he was a man who discharged his obligations eventually, he determined to carry out his promise to the young aristocrat. But first he had some business of his own to attend to.

He discarded his ragged tunic and moved off through the night naked but for a loin-cloth. As he went he fingered the poniard he had captured—a murderous weapon with a broad double-edged blade nineteen inches long. He slunk along alleys and shadowed plazas until he came to the district which was his destination—The Maze. Along its labyrinthin ways he went with the certainty of familiarity. It was indeed a maze of black alleys and enclosed courts and devious ways; of furtive sounds, and stenches. There was no paving on the streets; mud and filth mingled in an unsavory mess. Sewers were unknown; refuse was dumped into the alleys to form reeking heaps and puddles. Unless a man walked with care he was likely to lose his footing and plunge waist-deep into nauseous pools. Nor was it uncommon to stumble over a corpse lying with its throat cut or its head knocked in, in the mud. Honest folk shunned The Maze with good reason.

CONAN reached his destination without being seen, just as one he wished fervently to meet was leaving it. As the Cimmerian slunk into the courtyard below, the girl who had sold him to the police was taking leave of her new lover in a chamber one flight up. This young thug, her door closed behind him, groped his way down a creaking flight of stairs, intent on his own meditations, which, like those of most of the denizens of The Maze, had to do with the unlawful acquirement of property. Part-way down the stairs, he halted suddenly, his hair standing up. A vague bulk crouched in the darkness before him, a pair of eyes blazed like the eyes of a hunting beast. A beast-like snarl was the last thing he heard in life, as the monster lurched against him, and a keen blade ripped through his belly. He gave one gasping cry, and slumped down limply on the stairway.

The barbarian loomed above him for an instant, ghoul-like, his eyes burning in the gloom. He knew the sound was heard, but the people in The Maze were careful to attend to their own business. A death-cry on darkened stairs was nothing unusual. Later, some one would venture to investigate, but only after a reasonable lapse of time.

Conan went up the stairs and halted at a door he knew well of old. It was fastened within, but his blade passed between the door and the jamb and lifted the bar. He stepped inside, closing the door after him, and faced the girl who had betrayed him to the police.

The wench was sitting cross-legged in her shift on her unkempt bed. She turned white and stared at him as if at a ghost. She had heard the cry from the stairs, and she saw the red stain on the poniard in his hand. But she was too filled with terror on her own account to waste any time lamenting the evident fate of her lover. She began to beg for her life, almost incoherent with terror. Conan did not reply; he merely stood and glared at her with his burning eyes, testing the edge of his poniard with a calloused thumb.

At last he crossed the chamber, while she cowered back against the wall, sobbing frantic pleas for mercy. Grasping her yellow locks with no gentle hand, he dragged her off the bed. Thrusting his blade back in its sheath, he tucked his

squirming captive under his left arm, and strode to the window. Like most houses of that type, a ledge encircled each story, caused by the continuance of the window-ledges. Conan kicked the window open and stepped out on that narrow band. If any had been near or awake, they would have witnessed the bizarre sight of a man moving carefully along the ledge, carrying a kicking, half-naked wench under his arm. They would have been no more puzzled than the girl.

Reaching the spot he sought, Conan halted, gripping the wall with his free hand. Inside the building rose a sudden clamor, showing that the body had at last been discovered. His captive whimpered and twisted, renewing her importunities. Conan glanced down into the muck and slime of the alleys below; he listened briefly to the clamor inside and the pleas of the wench; then he dropped her with great accuracy into a cesspool. He enjoyed her kickings and flounderings and the concentrated venom of her profanity for a few seconds, and even allowed himself a low rumble of laughter. Then he lifted his head, listened to the growing tumult within the building, and decided it was time for him to kill Nabonidus.

3

It was a reverberating clang of metal that roused Murilo. He groaned and struggled dazedly to a sitting posture. About him all was silence and darkness, and for an instant he was sickened with the fear that he was blind. Then he remembered what had gone before, and his flesh crawled. By the sense of touch he found that he was lying on a floor of evenly joined stone slabs. Further groping discovered a wall of the same material. He rose and leaned against it, trying in vain to orient himself. That he was in some sort of a prison seemed certain, but where and how long he was unable to guess. He remembered dimly a clashing noise, and wondered if it had been the iron door of his dungeon closing on him, or if it betokened the entrance of an executioner.

At this thought he shuddered profoundly and began to feel his way along the wall. Momentarily he expected to encounter the limits of his prison, but after awhile he came to the conclusion that he was travelling down a corridor. He kept to the wall, fearful of pits or other traps, and was presently aware of something near him in the blackness. He could see nothing, but either his ears had caught a stealthy sound, or some subconscious sense warned him. He stopped short, his hair standing on end; as surely as he lived, he felt the presence of some living creature crouching in the darkness in front of him.

He thought his heart would stop when a voice hissed in a barbaric accent: "Murilo! Is it you?"

"Conan!" Limp from the reaction, the young nobleman groped in the darkness and his hands encountered a pair of great naked shoulders.

"A good thing I recognized you," grunted the barbarian. "I was about to stick you like a fattened pig."

"Where are we, in Mitra's name?"

"In the pits under the Red Priest's house; but why——"

"What is the time?"

"Not long after midnight."

Murilo shook his head, trying to assemble his scattered wits.

"What are you doing here?" demanded the Cimmerian.

"I came to kill Nabonidus. I heard they had changed the guard at your prison——"

"They did," growled Conan. "I broke the new jailer's head and walked out. I would have been here hours agone, but I

had some personal business to attend to. Well, shall we hunt for Nabonidus?"

Murilo shuddered. "Conan, we are in the house of the archfiend! I came seeking a human enemy; I found a hairy devil out of hell!"

Conan grunted uncertainly; fearless as a wounded tiger as far as human foes were concerned, he had all the superstitious dreads of the primitive.

"I gained access to the house," whispered Murilo, as if the darkness were full of listening ears. "In the outer gardens I found Nabonidus' dog mauled to death. Within the house I came upon Joka, the servant. His neck had been broken. Then I saw Nabonidus himself seated in his chair, clad in his accustomed garb. At first I thought he too was dead. I stole up to stab him. He rose and faced me. Gods!" The memory of that horror struck the young nobleman momentarily speechless as he re-lived that awful instant.

"Conan," he whispered, "it was no *man* that stood before me! In body and posture it was not unlike a man, but from the scarlet hood of the priest grinned a face of madness and nightmare! It was covered with black hair, from which small pig-like eyes glared redly; its nose was flat, with great flaring nostrils; its loose lips writhed back, disclosing huge yellow fangs, like the teeth of a dog. The hands that hung from the scarlet sleeves were misshapen and likewise covered with black hair. All this I saw in one glance, and then I was overcome with horror; my senses left me and I swooned."

"What then?" muttered the Cimmerian uneasily.

"I recovered consciousness only a short time ago; the monster must have thrown me into these pits. Conan, I have suspected that Nabonidus was not wholly human! He is a demon—a were-thing! By day he moves among humanity in the guise of men, and by night he takes on his true aspect."

"That's evident," answered Conan. "Every one knows there are men who take the form of wolves at will. But why did he kill his servants?"

"Who can delve the mind of a devil?" replied Murilo. "Our present interest is in getting out of this place. Human weapons can not harm a were-man. How did you get in here?"

"Through the sewer. I reckoned on the gardens being guarded. The sewers connect with a tunnel that lets into these pits. I thought to find some door leading up into the house unbolted."

"Then let us escape by the way you came!" exclaimed Murilo. "To the devil with it! Once out of this snake-den, we'll take our chance with the king's guardsmen, and risk a flight from the city. Lead on!"

"Useless," grunted the Cimmerian. "The way to the sewers is barred. As I entered the tunnel an iron grille crashed down from the roof. If I had not moved quicker than a flash of lightning, its spear-heads would have pinned me to the floor like a worm. When I tried to lift it, it wouldn't move. An elephant couldn't shake it. Nor could anything bigger than a rabbit squirm between the bars."

Murilo cursed, an icy hand playing up and down his spine. He might have known Nabonidus would not leave any entrance into his house unguarded. Had Conan not possessed the steel-spring quickness of a wild thing, that falling portcullis would have skewered him. Doubtless his walking through the tunnel had sprung some hidden catch that released it from the roof. As it was, both were trapped living.

"There's but one thing to do," said Murilo, sweating profusely. "That's to search for some other exit; doubtless

they're all set with traps, but we have no other choice."

THE barbarian grunted agreement, and the companions began groping their way at random down the corridor. Even at that moment, something occurred to Murilo.

"How did you recognize me in this blackness?" he demanded.

"I smelled the perfume you put on your hair, when you came to my cell," answered Conan. "I smelled it again a while ago, when I was crouching in the dark and preparing to rip you open."

Murilo put a lock of his black hair to his nostrils; even so the scent was barely apparent to his civilized senses, and he realized how keen must be the organs of the barbarian.

Instinctively his hand went to his scabbard as they groped onward, and he cursed to find it empty. At that moment a faint glow became apparent ahead of them, and presently they came to a sharp bend in the corridor, about which the light filtered grayly. Together they peered around the corner, and Murilo, leaning against his companion, felt his huge frame stiffen. The young nobleman had also seen it—the body of a man, half naked, lying limply in the corridor beyond the bend, vaguely illumined by a radiance which seemed to emanate from a broad silver disk on the farther wall. A strange familiarity about the recumbent figure, which lay face down, stirred Murilo with inexplicable and monstrous conjectures. Motioning the Cimmerian to follow him, he stole forward and bent above the body. Overcoming a certain repugnance, he grasped it and turned it on its back. An incredulous oath escaped him; the Cimmerian grunted explosively.

"Nabonidus! The Red Priest!" ejaculated Murilo, his brain a dizzy vortex of whirling amazement. "Then who—what——?"

The priest groaned and stirred. With cat-like quickness Conan bent over him, poniard poised above his heart. Murilo caught his wrist.

"Wait! Don't kill him yet——"

"Why not?" demanded the Cimmerian. "He has cast off his were-guise, and sleeps. Will you awaken him to tear us to pieces?"

"No, wait!" urged Murilo, trying to collect his jumbled wits. "Look! He is not sleeping—see that great blue welt on his shaven temple? He has been knocked senseless. He may have been lying here for hours."

"I thought you swore you saw him in beastly shape in the house above," said Conan.

"I did! Or else—he's coming to! Keep back your blade, Conan; there is a mystery here even darker than I thought. I must have words with this priest, before we kill him."

Nabonidus lifted a hand vaguely to his bruised temple, mumbled, and opened his eyes. For an instant they were blank and empty of intelligence; then life came back to them with a jerk, and he sat up, staring at the companions. Whatever terrific jolt had temporarily addled his razor-keen brain, it was functioning with its accustomed vigor again. His eyes shot swiftly about him, then came back to rest on Murilo's face.

"You honor my poor house, young sir," he laughed coolly, glancing at the great figure that loomed behind the young nobleman's shoulder. "You have brought a bravo, I see. Was your sword not sufficient to sever the life of my humble self?"

"Enough of this," impatiently returned Murilo. "How long have you lain here?"

"A peculiar question to put to a man just recovering consciousness," answered

the priest. "I do not know what time it now is. But it lacked an hour or so of midnight when I was set upon."

"Then who is it that masquerades in your own gown in the house above?" demanded Murilo.

"That will be Thak," answered Nabonidus, ruefully fingering his bruises. "Yes, that will be Thak. And in my gown? The dog!"

Conan, who comprehended none of this, stirred restlessly, and growled something in his own tongue. Nabonidus glanced at him whimsically.

"Your bully's knife yearns for my heart, Murilo," he said. "I thought you might be wise enough to take my warn ing and leave the city."

"How was I to know that was to be granted me?" returned Murilo. "At any rate, my interests are here."

"You are in good company with that cutthroat," murmured Nabonidus. "I had suspected you for some time. That was why I caused that pallid court secretary to disappear. Before he died he told me many things, among others the name of the young nobleman who bribed him to filch state secrets, which the nobleman in turn sold to rival powers. Are you not ashamed of yourself, Murilo, you white-handed thief?"

"I have no more cause for shame than you, you vulture-hearted plunderer," answered Murilo promptly. "You exploit a whole kingdom for your personal greed, and under the guise of disinterested statesmanship, you swindle the king, beggar the rich, oppress the poor, and sacrifice the whole future of the nation for your ruthless ambition. You are no more than a fat hog with his snout in the trough. You are a greater thief than I am. This Cimmerian is the most honest man of the three of us, because he steals and murders openly."

"Well, then, we are all rogues together," agreed Nabonidus equably. "And what now? My life?"

"When I saw the ear of the secretary that had disappeared, I knew I was doomed," said Murilo abruptly, "and I believed you would invoke the authority of the king. Was I right?"

"Quite so," answered the priest. "A court secretary is easy to do away with, but you are a bit too prominent. I had intended telling the king a jest about you in the morning."

"A jest that would have cost me my head," muttered Murilo. "Then the king is unaware of my foreign enterprises?"

"As yet," sighed Nabonidus. "And now, since I see your companion has his knife, I fear that jest will never be told."

"You should know how to get out of these rat-dens," said Murilo. "Suppose I agree to spare your life. Will you help us to escape, and swear to keep silent about my thievery?"

"When did a priest keep an oath?" complained Conan, comprehending the trend of the conversation. "Let me cut his throat; I want to see what color his blood is. They say in The Maze that his heart is black, so his blood must be black too——"

"Be quiet," whispered Murilo. "If he does not show us the way out of these pits, we may rot here. Well, Nabonidus, what do you say?"

"What does a wolf with his leg in the trap say?" laughed the priest. "I am in your power, and if we are to escape, we must aid one another. I swear, if we survive this adventure, to forget all your shifty dealings. I swear by the soul of Mitra!"

"I am satisfied," muttered Murilo. "Even the Red Priest would not break that oath. Now to get out of here. My friend here entered by way of the tunnel,

but a grille fell behind him and blocked the way. Can you cause it to be lifted?"

"Not from these pits," answered the priest. "The control lever is in the chamber above the tunnel. There is only one other way out of these pits, which I will show you. But tell me, how did you come here?"

Murilo told him in a few words, and Nabonidus nodded, rising stiffly. He limped down the corridor, which here widened into a sort of vast chamber, and approached the distant silver disk. As they advanced the light increased, though it never became anything but a dim shadowy radiance. Near the disk they saw a narrow stair leading upward.

"That is the other exit," said Nabonidus. "And I strongly doubt if the door at the head is bolted. But I have an idea that he who would go through that door had better cut his own throat first. Look into the disk."

WHAT had seemed a silver plate was in reality a great mirror set in the wall. A confusing system of copper-like tubes jutted out from the wall above it, bending down toward it at right angles. Glancing into these tubes, Murilo saw a bewildering array of smaller mirrors. He turned his attention to the larger mirror in the wall, and ejaculated in amazement. Peering over his shoulder, Conan grunted.

They seemed to be looking through a broad window into a well-lighted chamber. There were broad mirrors on the walls, with velvet hangings between; there were silken couches, chairs of ebony and ivory, and curtained doorways leading off from the chamber. And before one doorway which was not curtained, sat a bulky black object that contrasted grotesquely with the richness of the chamber.

Murilo felt his blood freeze again as he looked at the horror which seemed to be staring directly into his eyes. Involuntarily he recoiled from the mirror, while Conan thrust his head truculently forward, till his jaws almost touched the surface, growling some threat or defiance in his own barbaric tongue.

"In Mitra's name, Nabonidus," gasped Murilo, shaken, "what is it?"

"That is Thak," answered the priest, caressing his temple. "Some would call him an ape, but he is almost as different from a real ape as he is different from a real man. His people dwell far to the east, in the mountains that fringe the eastern frontiers of Zamora. There are not many of them, but if they are not exterminated, I believe they will become human beings, in perhaps a hundred thousand years. They are in the formative stage; they are neither apes, as their remote ancestors were, nor men, as their remote descendants may be. They dwell in the high crags of well-nigh inaccessible mountains, knowing nothing of fire or the making of shelter or garments, or the use of weapons. Yet they have a language of a sort, consisting mainly of grunts and clicks.

"I took Thak when he was a cub, and he learned what I taught him much more swiftly and thoroughly than any true animal could have done. He was at once bodyguard and servant. But I forgot that being partly a man, he could not be submerged into a mere shadow of myself, like a true animal. Apparently his semi-brain retained impressions of hate, resentment, and some sort of bestial ambition of its own.

"At any rate, he struck when I least expected it. Last night he appeared to go suddenly mad. His actions had all the appearance of bestial insanity, yet I know that they must have been the result of long and careful planning.

"I heard a sound of fighting in the garden, and going to investigate—for I believed it was yourself, being dragged down by my watch-dog—I saw Thak emerge from the shrubbery dripping with blood. Before I was aware of his intention, he sprang at me with an awful scream and struck me senseless. I remember no more, but can only surmise that, following some whim of his semi-human brain, he stripped me of my gown and cast me still living into the pits—for what reason, only the gods can guess. He must have killed the dog when he came from the garden, and after he struck me down, he evidently killed Joka, as you saw the man lying dead in the house. Joka would have come to my aid, even against Thak, whom he always hated."

Murilo stared in the mirror at the creature which sat with such monstrous patience before the closed door. He shuddered at the sight of the great black hands, thickly grown with hair that was almost fur-like. The body was thick, broad and stooped. The unnaturally wide shoulders had burst the scarlet gown, and on these shoulders Murilo noted the same thick growth of black hair. The face peering from the scarlet hood was utterly bestial, and yet Murilo realized that Nabonidus spoke truth when he said that Thak was not wholly a beast. There was something in the red murky eyes, something in the creature's clumsy posture, something in the whole appearance of the thing that set it apart from the truly animal. That monstrous body housed a brain and soul that were just budding awfully into something vaguely human. Murilo stood aghast as he recognized a faint and hideous kinship between his kind and that squatting monstrosity, and he was nauseated by a fleeting realization of the abysses of bellowing bestiality up through which humanity had painfully toiled.

"Surely he sees us," muttered Conan. "Why does he not charge us? He could break this window with ease."

Murilo realized that Conan supposed the mirror to be a window through which they were looking.

"He does not see us," answered the priest. "We are looking into the chamber above us. That door that Thak is guarding is the one at the head of these stairs. It is simply an arrangement of mirrors. Do you see those mirrors on the walls? They transmit the reflection of the room into these tubes, down which other mirrors carry it to reflect it at last on an enlarged scale in this great mirror."

Murilo realized that the priest must be centuries ahead of his generation, to perfect such an invention; but Conan put it down to witchcraft, and troubled his head no more about it.

"I constructed these pits for a place of refuge as well as a dungeon," the priest was saying. "There are times when I have taken refuge here, and through these mirrors, watched doom fall upon those who sought me with ill intent."

"But why is Thak watching that door?" demanded Murilo.

"He must have heard the falling of the grating in the tunnel. It is connected with bells in the chambers above. He knows some one is in the pits, and he is waiting for him to come up the stairs. Oh, he has learned well the lessons I taught him. He has seen what happened to men who came through that door, when I tugged at the rope that hangs on yonder wall, and he waits to mimic me."

"And while he waits, what are we to do?" demanded Murilo.

"There is naught we can do, except watch him. As long as he is in that chamber, we dare not ascend the stairs. He has

the strength of a true gorilla, and could easily tear us all to pieces. But he does not need to exert his muscles; if we open that door he has but to tug that rope, and blast us into eternity."

"How?"

"I bargained to help you escape," answered the priest; "not to betray my secrets."

MURILO started to reply, then stiffened suddenly. A stealthy hand had parted the curtains of one of the doorways. Between them appeared a dark face whose glittering eyes fixed menacingly on the squat form in the scarlet robe.

"Petreus!" hissed Nabonidus. "Mitra, what a gathering of vultures this night is!"

The face remained framed between the parted curtains. Over the intruder's shoulder other faces peered—dark, thin faces, alight with sinister eagerness.

"What do they here?" muttered Murilo, unconsciously lowering his voice, although he knew they could not hear him.

"Why, what would Petreus and his ardent young nationalists be doing in the house of the Red Priest?" laughed Nabonidus. "Look how eagerly they glare at the figure they think is their arch-enemy. They have fallen into your error; it should be amusing to watch their expressions when they are disillusioned."

Murilo did not reply. The whole affair had a distinctly unreal atmosphere. He felt as if he were watching the play of puppets, or as a disembodied ghost himself, impersonally viewing the actions of the living, his presence unseen and unsuspected.

He saw Petreus put his finger warningly to his lips, and nod to his fellow-conspirators. The young nobleman could not tell if Thak were aware of the intruders. The apeman's position had not changed, as he sat with his back toward the door through which the men were gliding.

"They had the same idea you had," Nabonidus was muttering at his ear. "Only their reasons were patriotic rather than selfish. Easy to gain access to my house, now that the dog is dead. Oh, what a chance to rid myself of their menace once and for all! If I were sitting where Thak sits—a leap to the wall—a tug on that rope——"

Petreus had placed one foot lightly over the threshold of the chamber; his fellows were at his heels, their daggers glinting dully. Suddenly Thak rose and wheeled toward him. The unexpected horror of his appearance, where they had thought to behold the hated but familiar countenance of Nabonidus, wrought havoc with their nerves, as the same spectacle had wrought upon Murilo. With a shriek Petreus recoiled, carrying his companions backward with him. They stumbled and floundered over each other, and in that instant Thak, covering the distance in one prodigious, grotesque leap, caught and jerked powerfully at a thick velvet rope which hung near the doorway.

Instantly the curtains whipped back on either hand, leaving the door clear, and down across it something flashed with a peculiar silvery blur.

"He remembered!" Nabonidus was exulting. "The beast is half a man! He had seen the doom performed, and he remembered! Watch, now! Watch! Watch!"

Murilo saw that it was a panel of heavy glass that had fallen across the doorway. Through it he saw the pallid faces of the conspirators. Petreus, throwing out his hands as if to ward off a charge from Thak, encountered the transparent barrier, and from his gestures, said something to his companions. Now that the curtains

were drawn back, the men in the pits could see all that took place in the chamber that contained the nationalists. Completely unnerved, these ran across the chamber toward the door by which they had apparently entered, only to halt suddenly, as if stopped by an invisible wall.

"The jerk of the rope sealed that chamber," laughed Nabonidus. "It is simple; the glass panels work in grooves in the doorways. Jerking the rope trips the spring that holds them. They slide down and lock in place, and can only be worked from outside. The glass is unbreakable; a man with a mallet could not shatter it. Ah!"

The trapped men were in a hysteria of fright; they ran wildly from one door to another, beating vainly at the crystal walls, shaking their fists wildly at the implacable black shape which squatted outside. Then one threw back his head, glared upward, and began to scream, to judge from the working of his lips, while he pointed toward the ceiling.

"The fall of the panels released the clouds of doom," said the Red Priest with a wild laugh. "The dust of the gray lotus, from the Swamps of the Dead, beyond the land of Khitai."

IN THE middle of the ceiling hung a cluster of gold buds; these had opened like the petals of a great carven rose, and from them billowed a gray mist that swiftly filled the chamber. Instantly the scene changed from one of hysteria to one of madness and horror. The trapped men began to stagger; they ran in drunken circles. Froth dripped from their lips, which twisted as in awful laughter. Raging they fell upon one another with daggers and teeth, slashing, tearing, slaying in a holocaust of madness. Murilo turned sick as he watched, and was glad that he could not hear the screams and howls with which that doomed chamber must be ringing. Like pictures thrown on a screen, it was silent.

Outside the chamber of horror Thak was leaping up and down in brutish glee, tossing his long hairy arms on high. At Murilo's shoulder Nabonidus was laughing like a fiend.

"Ha, a good stroke, Petreus! That fairly disemboweled him! Now one for you, my patriotic friend! So! They are all down, and the living tear the flesh of the dead with their slavering teeth."

Murilo shuddered. Behind him the Cimmerian swore softly in his uncouth tongue. Only death was to be seen in the chamber of the gray mist; torn, gashed and mangled, the conspirators lay in a red heap, gaping mouths and blood-dabbled faces staring blankly upward through the slowly swirling eddies of gray.

Thak, stooping like a giant gnome, approached the wall where the rope hung, and gave it a peculiar sidewise pull.

"He is opening the farther door," said Nabonidus. "By Mitra, he is more of a human than even I had guessed! See, the mist swirls out of the chamber, and is dissipated. He waits, to be safe. Now he raises the other panel. He is cautious—he knows the doom of the gray lotus, which brings madness and death. By Mitra!"

Murilo jerked about at the electric quality of the exclamation.

"Our one chance!" exclaimed Nabonidus. "If he leaves the chamber above for a few minutes, we will risk a dash up those stairs."

Suddenly tense, they watched the monster waddle through the doorway and vanish. With the lifting of the glass panel, the curtains had fallen again, hiding the chamber of death.

"We must chance it!" gasped Nabonidus, and Murilo saw perspiration break

out on his face. "Perhaps he will be disposing of the bodies as he has seen me do. Quick! Follow me up those stairs!"

He ran toward the steps and up them with an agility that amazed Murilo. The young nobleman and the barbarian were close at his heels, and they heard his gusty sigh of relief as he threw open the door at the top of the stairs. They burst into the broad chamber they had seen mirrored below. Thak was nowhere to be seen.

"He's in that chamber with the corpses!" exclaimed Murilo. "Why not trap him there as he trapped them?"

"No, no!" gasped Nabonidus, an unaccustomed pallor tingeing his features. "We do not know that he is in there. He might emerge before we could reach the trap-rope, anyway! Follow me into this corridor; I must reach my chamber and obtain weapons which will destroy him. This corridor is the only one opening from this chamber which is not set with a trap of some kind."

THEY followed him swiftly through a curtained doorway opposite the door of the death-chamber, and came into a corridor, into which various chambers opened. With fumbling haste Nabonidus began to try the doors on each side. They were locked, as was the door at the other end of the corridor.

"My God!" The Red Priest leaned against the wall, his skin ashen. "The doors are locked, and Thak took my keys from me. We are trapped, after all."

Murilo stared appalled to see the man in such a state of nerves, and Nabonidus pulled himself together with an effort.

"That beast has me in a panic," he said. "If you had seen him tear men as I have seen—well, Mitra aid us, but we must fight him now with what the gods have given us. Come!"

He led them back to the curtained doorway, and peered into the great chamber in time to see Thak emerge from the opposite doorway. It was apparent that the beast-man had suspected something. His small, close-set ears twitched; he glared angrily about him, and approaching the nearest doorway, tore aside the curtains to look behind them.

Nabonidus drew back, shaking like a leaf. He gripped Conan's shoulder. "Man, do you dare pit your knife against his fangs?"

The Cimmerian's eyes blazed in answer.

"Quick!" the Red Priest whispered, thrusting him behind the curtains, close against the wall. "As he will find us soon enough, we will draw him to us. As he rushes past you, sink your blade in his back if you can. You, Murilo, show yourself to him, and then flee up the corridor. Mitra knows, we have no chance with him in hand-to-hand combat, but we are doomed anyway when he finds us."

Murilo felt his blood congeal in his veins, but he steeled himself, and stepped outside the doorway. Instantly Thak, on the other side of the chamber, wheeled, glared, and charged with a thunderous roar. His scarlet hood had fallen back, revealing his black misshapen head; his black hands and red robe were splashed with a brighter red. He was like a crimson and black nightmare as he rushed across the chamber, fangs bared, his bowed legs hurtling his enormous body along at a terrifying gait.

Murilo turned and ran back into the corridor, and quick as he was, the shaggy horror was almost at his heels. Then as the monster rushed past the curtains, from among them catapulted a great form that struck full on the apeman's shoulders, at the same instant driving the poniard into the brutish back. Thak screamed horribly as the impact knocked him off

his feet, and the combatants hit the floor together. Instantly there began a whirl and thrash of limbs, the tearing and rending of a fiendish battle.

Murilo saw that the barbarian had locked his legs about the apeman's torso, and was striving to maintain his position on the monster's back, while he butchered it with his poniard. Thak, on the other hand, was striving to dislodge his clinging foe, to drag him around within reach of the giant fangs that gaped for his flesh. In a whirlwind of blows and scarlet tatters they rolled along the corridor, revolving so swiftly that Murilo dared not use the chair he had caught up, lest he strike the Cimmerian. And he saw that in spite of the handicap of Conan's first hold, and the voluminous robe that lashed and wrapped about the apeman's limbs and body, Thak's giant strength was swiftly prevailing. Inexorably he was dragging the Cimmerian around in front of him. The apeman had taken punishment enough to have killed a dozen men. Conan's poniard had sunk again and again into his torso, shoulders, and bull-like neck; he was streaming blood from a score of wounds, but unless the blade quickly reached some absolutely vital spot, Thak's inhuman vitality would survive to finish the Cimmerian, and after him, Conan's companions.

Conan was fighting like a wild beast himself, in silence except for his gasps of effort. The black talons of the monster and the awful grasp of those misshapen hands ripped and tore at him, the grinning jaws gaped for his throat. Then Murilo, seeing an opening, sprang and swung the chair with all his power, and with force enough to have brained a human being. The chair glanced from Thak's slanted black skull; but the stunned monster momentarily relaxed his rending grasp, and in that instant Conan, gasping and streaming blood, plunged forward and sank his poniard to the hilt in the apeman's heart.

With a convulsive shudder the beast-man started from the floor, then sank limply back. His fierce eyes set and glazed, his thick limbs quivered and became rigid.

CONAN staggered dizzily up, shaking the sweat and blood out of his eyes. Blood dripped from his poniard and fingers, and trickled in rivulets down his thighs, arms and breast. Murilo caught at him to support him, but the barbarian shook him off impatiently.

"When I can not stand alone, it will be time to die," he mumbled, through mashed lips. "But I'd like a flagon of wine."

Nabonidus was staring down at the still figure as if he could not believe his own eyes. Black, hairy, abhorrent, the monster lay, grotesque in the tatters of the scarlet robe; yet more human than bestial, even so, and possessed somehow of a vague and terrible pathos.

Even the Cimmerian sensed this, for he panted: "I have slain a *man* tonight, not a *beast*. I will count him among the chiefs whose souls I've sent into the dark, and my women will sing of him."

Nabonidus stooped and picked up a bunch of keys on a golden chain. They had fallen from the apeman's girdle during the battle. Motioning his companions to follow him, he led them to a chamber, unlocked the door, and led the way inside. It was illumined like the others. The Red Priest took a vessel of wine from a table and filled crystal beakers. As his companions drank thirstily, he murmured: "What a night! It is nearly dawn, now. What of you, my friends?"

"I'll dress Conan's hurts, if you will fetch me bandages and the like," said

Murilo, and Nabonidus nodded, and moved toward the door that let into the corridor. Something about his bowed head caused Murilo to watch him sharply. At the door the Red Priest wheeled suddenly. His face had undergone a transformation. His eyes gleamed with his old fire, his lips laughed soundlessly.

"Rogues together!" his voice rang with its accustomed mockery. "But not fools together. You are the fool, Murilo!"

"What do you mean?" The young nobleman started forward.

"Back!" Nabonidus's voice cracked like a whip. "Another step and I will blast you!"

Murilo's blood turned cold as he saw that the Red Priest's hand grasped a thick velvet rope which hung among the curtains just outside the door.

"What treachery is this?" cried Murilo. "You swore——"

"I swore I would not tell the king a jest concerning you! I did not swear not to take matters into my own hands if I could. Do you think I would pass up such an opportunity? Under ordinary circumstances I would not dare to kill you myself, without sanction of the king, but now none will ever know. You will go into the acid-vats along with Thak and the nationalist fools, and none will be the wiser. What a night this has been for me! If I have lost some valuable servants, I have nevertheless rid myself of various dangerous enemies. Stand back! I am over the threshold, and you can not possibly reach me before I tug this cord and send you to hell. Not the gray lotus, this time, but something just as effective. Nearly every chamber in my house is a trap. And so, Murilo, fool that you are——"

Too quickly for the sight to follow, Conan caught up a stool and hurled it. Nabonidus instinctively threw up his arm with a cry, but not in time. The missile crunched against his head, and the Red Priest swayed and fell face-down in a slowly widening pool of dark crimson.

"His blood was red, after all," grunted Conan.

Murilo raked back his sweat-plastered hair with a shaky hand as he leaned against the table, weak from the reaction of relief.

"It is dawn," he said. "Let us get out of here, before we fall afoul of some other doom. If we can climb the outer wall without being seen, we won't be connected with this night's work. Let the police write their own explanation."

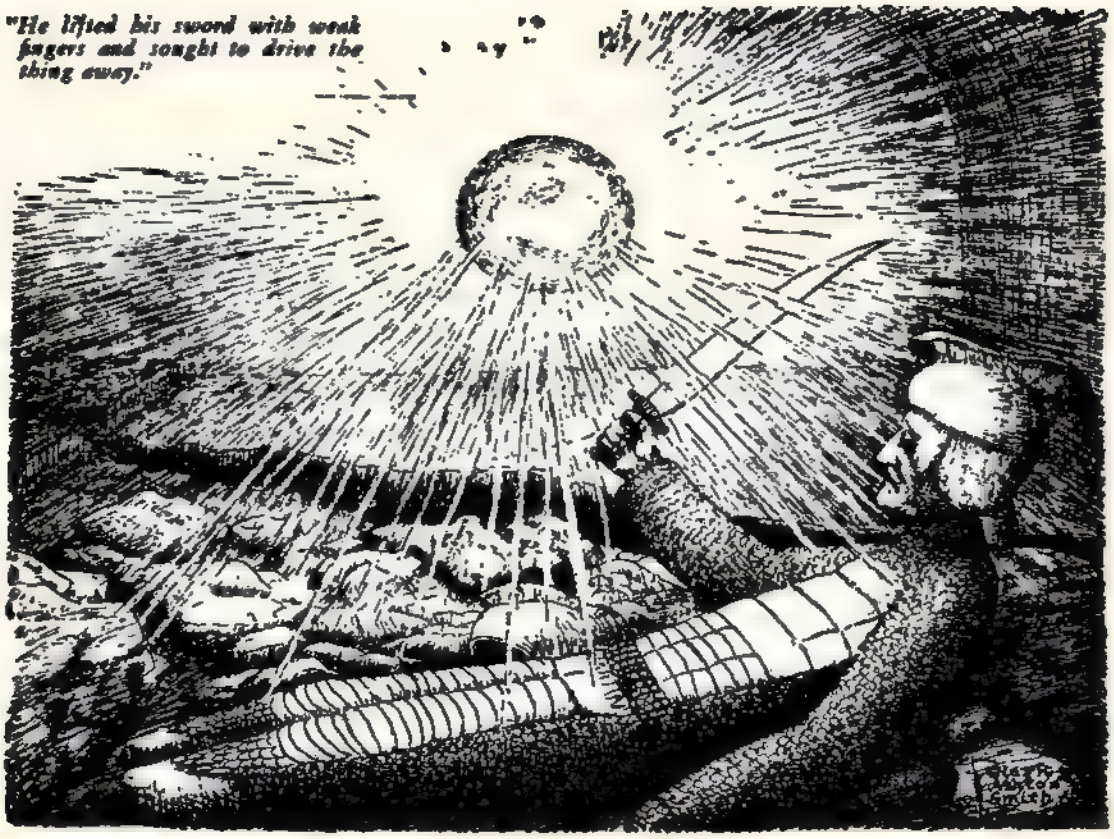
He glanced at the body of the Red Priest where it lay etched in crimson, and shrugged his shoulders.

"He was the fool, after all; had he not paused to taunt us, he could have trapped us easily."

"Well," said the Cimmerian tranquilly, "he's travelled the road all rogues must walk at last. I'd like to loot the house, but I suppose we'd best go."

As they emerged into the dimness of the dawn-whitened garden, Murilo said: "The Red Priest has gone into the dark, so my road is clear in the city, and I have nothing to fear. But what of you? There is still the matter of that priest in The Maze, and——"

"I'm tired of this city anyway," grinned the Cimmerian. "You mentioned a horse waiting at the Rat's Den. I'm curious to see how fast that horse can carry me into another kingdom. There's many a highway I want to travel before I walk the road Nabonidus walked this night."



"He lifted his sword with weak fingers and sought to drive the thing away."

The Weaver in the Vault

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

A story of the weird and ghastly-beautiful horror that came upon the searchers in the eery tombs of Chaon Gacca

THE instructions of Famorgh, fifty-ninth king of Tasuun, were minutely circumstantial and explicit, and moreover, were not to be disobeyed without the incurring of penalties that would make mere death a pleasant thing. Yanur, Grotara, and Thirlain Ludoch, three of the king's hardiest henchmen, riding forth at morn from the palace in Miraab, debated with a thin semblance of jocosity whether, in their case, obedience or disobedience would prove the direr evil.

The commission they had just received from Famorgh was no less distasteful than singular. They were to visit Chaon Gacca, the long-forsaken seat of the kings of Tasuun, lying more than ninety miles to the north of Miraab; and, descending into the burial-vaults beneath the ruined palace, were to find and bring back to Miraab whatever remained of the mummy of King Tnepreez, founder of the dynasty to which Famorgh belonged. No one had entered Chaon Gacca for centuries; and the preservation of its dead in the cata-

combs was uncertain: but even if only the skull of Tnepreez was left, or the bone of his little finger, or the dust of mummia into which he had crumbled, the men-at-arms were to fetch it carefully, guarding it like a holy relic.

"'Tis an errand for hyenas, rather than warriors," grumbled Yanur in his black and spade-shaped beard. "By the god Yululun, keeper of the tombs, I deem it an ill thing to disturb the peaceful dead. And truly it is not well for men to enter Chaon Gacca, where Death has made his capital, and has gathered all the ghouls to do him homage."

"The king should have sent his embalmers," opined Grotara. He was the youngest and hugest of the three, being taller by a full head than Yanur or Thirlain Ludoch; and like them, he was a veteran of savage wars and desperate perils.

"Yea, I said it was an errand for hyenas," rejoined Yanur. "But the king knew well that there were no mortal beings in all Miraab, saving ourselves, who would dare to enter the accursed vaults of Chaon Gacca. Two centuries ago, King Mandis, wishing to retrieve the golden mirror of Queen Avaina for his favorite leman, commanded two of his bravos to descend within the vaults, where the mummy of Avaina sits enthroned in her separate tomb, holding the mirror in her withered hand. . . . And the bravos went to Chaon Gacca . . . but they did not return; and King Mandis, being warned by a soothsayer, made no second attempt to procure the mirror, but contented his leman with another gift."

"Yanur, thy tales would gladden those who await the scything of the executioner," said Thirlain Ludoch, the oldest of the trio, whose brown beard was faded to a hempen hue by desert suns. "But I chide thee not. It is common knowledge that the catacombs are ridden with worse hauntings than those of liches or phantoms. Strange devils came there long ago from the mad, unholy desert of Dloth; and I have heard it told that the kings forsook Chaon Gacca because of certain Shadows, that appeared at full noon in the palace-halls, with no visible form to cast them, and would not depart thereafter, being changeless amid all the changings of the light, and wholly undimmed by the exorcisms of priests and sorcerers. Men say that the flesh of any who dared to touch the Shadows, or to tread upon them, became black and putrid like the flesh of month-old corpses, all in a mere instant. Because of such testing, when one of the Shadows came and sat upon his throne, the right hand of King Agmeni rotted to the wrist, and fell away like the sloughing of a leper. . . . And after that, no man would dwell in Chaon Gacca."

"Verily, I have heard other stories," said Yanur. "The town's abandonment was due mainly to the failure of the wells and cisterns, from which the water vanished following an earthquake that left the land riven with hell-deep chasms. The palace of the kings was sundered to its nethermost vault by one of the chasms; and King Agmeni was seized by a violent madness when he inhaled the infernal vapors issuing from the rent; nor was he ever wholly sane in his latter lifetime, after the quitting of Chaon Gacca and the rearing of Miraab."

"Now that is a tale that I can believe," said Grotara. "And surely I must deem that Famorgh has inherited the madness of his forefather, Agmeni. Methinks that the royal house of Tasuun rots and totters to its fall. Harlots and sorcerers swarm in the palace of Famorgh like charnel-worms; and now, in this princess Lunalia of Xylac whom he has taken to wife, he

has found a harlot and a witch in one. He has sent us on this errand at the prompting of Lunalia, who desires the mummy of Tnepreez for her own unhallowed purpose. Tnepreez, I have heard, was a great wizard in his time; and Lunalia would avail herself of the potent virtue of his bones and dust in the brewing of her philtres. Pah! I like not the task of such purveyance. There are mummies enow in Miraab for the making of potions to madden the Queen's lovers. Famorgh is utterly besotted and befooled."

"Beware," admonished Thirlain Ludoch, "for Lunalia is a vampire who lusts ever for the young and strong . . . and thy turn may come next, O Grotara, if fortune brings us back alive from this enterprise. I have seen her watching thee."

"I would sooner mate with the wild lamia," protested Grotara in virtuous indignation.

"Thine aversion would help thee not," said Thirlain Ludoch . . . "for I know others who have drunk the potions. . . . But we are now nearing the last wineshop in Miraab; and my throat is dusty beforehand with the very thought of this journey. I shall need a whole stoup of wine from Yoros to wash the dust away."

"Thou sayest sooth," agreed Yanur. "Already I have become dry as the mummy of Tnepreez. And thou, Grotara?"

"I will quaff any drink, if it be not the philtre-brew of Queen Lunalia."

MOUNTED on swift, untiring dromedaries, and followed by a fourth camel bearing on its back a light wooden sarcophagus for the accommodation of King Tnepreez, the three henchmen had soon left behind them the bright and noisy streets of Miraab, and the fields of sesame, the crofts of apricot and pomegranate, lying for miles about the city. Before noon, they had parted from the route of caravans, and had taken a road that was seldom used by any but lions and jackals. However, the way to Chaon Gacca was plain, for the ruts of olden chariots were still deeply marked in the desert soil, where rain no longer fell at any season.

On the first night, they slept beneath the cold and crowding stars, and kept watch by turn lest a lion should come upon them unaware, or a viper should crawl among them for warmth. During the second day they passed amid steepening hills and deep ravines that retarded their progress. Here there was no rustling of serpent or lizard, and naught but their own voices and the shuffling of the camels to break the silence that lay upon all things like a mute malediction. Sometimes, on the desiccating tors above them, against the darkly litten sky, they saw the boughs of century-withered cacti, or the boles of trees that immemorial fires had blasted.

The second sunset found them in sight of Chaon Gacca, rearing its dilapidated walls at a distance of less than five leagues in a broad open valley. Coming then to a wayside shrine of Yuckla, the small and grotesque god of laughter, whose influence was believed to be mainly benignant, they were glad to go no farther on that day, but took shelter in the crumbling shrine for fear of the ghouls and devils, who might dwell in such vicinage to those accursed ruins. They had brought with them from Miraab a wine-skin filled with the fervent ruby wine of Yoros; and though the skin was now three-fourths empty, they poured a libation in the twilight on the broken altar, and prayed to Yuckla for such protection as he might give them against the demons of the night.

They slept on the worn and chilly flags about the altar, watching by turn, as before. Grotara, who kept the third watch, beheld at last the paling of the close-hung stars, and aroused his companions in a dawn that was like a sifting of ashes through the cinder-black darkness.

After a scanty meal of figs and dried goat-flesh, they resumed their journey, guiding their camels down the valley, and weaving back and forth on the bouldered slopes when they came to abysmal rents in the earth and rock. Their approach to the ruins was rendered slow and tortuous by such divagations. The way was lined by the stocks of orchard trees that had perished long ago, and by cotes and granges where even the hyena no longer made his lair.

BECAUSE of their many detours, it was hard upon noon when they rode through the hollow-ringing streets of the city. Like ragged purple cloaks, the shadows of the ruining houses were drawn close to their walls and portals. Everywhere the havoc of earthquake was manifest, and the fissured avenues and mounded mansions served to verify the tales that Yanur had heard concerning the reason of the city's abandonment.

The palace of the kings, however, was still pre-eminent above the other buildings. A tumbled pile, it frowned in dark porphyry on a low acropolis amid the northern quarter. For the making of this acropolis, a hill of red syenite had been stripped of its covering soil in elder days, and had been hewn to sheer and rounding walls, circled by a road that wound slowly about it to the summit. Following this road, and nearing the portals of the courtyard, the henchmen of Famorgh came to a fissure that clove their path from wall to precipice, yawning far in the cliff. The chasm was less than a yard in width; but the dromedaries balked before it. The three dismounted; and, leaving the camels to await their return, they leapt lightly across the fissure. Grotara and Thirlain Ludoch carrying the sarcophagus, and Yanur bearing the wine-skin, they passed beneath the shattered barbican.

The great courtyard was heavily strewn with the wreckage of once-lofty towers and balconies, over which the warriors climbed with much wariness, eyeing the shadows closely, and loosening their swords in the sheath, as if they were surmounting the barricades of a hidden foe. All three were startled by the pale and naked form of a colossean female, which they saw reclining on the blocks and rubble in a portico beyond the court. But, drawing nearer, they found that the shape was not that of a she-demon, as they had apprehended, but was merely a marble statue that had once stood like a caryatid among the mighty pillars.

Following the directions given them by Famorgh, they entered the main hall. Here, beneath the chasmed and collapsing roof, they moved with the utmost caution, fearing that a light jar, a whisper, would bring the suspended ruin upon their heads like an avalanche. Overturned tripods of greening copper, tables and trivets of splintered ebony, and the shards of gayly painted porcelains, were mingled with the huge fragments of pedestals and fusts and entablatures; and upon a shivered dais of green, blood-spotted heliotrope, the tarnished silver throne of the kings careened amid the mutilated sphinxes, carved from jasper, that kept eternal guard beside it.

At the farther end of the hall, they found an alcove, still unblocked by fallen débris, in which were the stairs that led downward to the catacombs. They paused

briefly ere beginning their descent. Yanur applied himself without ceremony to the skin which he carried, and lightened it considerably before giving it into the hands of Thirlain Ludoch, who had marked his potations with solicitude. Thirlain Ludoch and Grotara drank the remainder of the vintage between them; and the latter did not grumble at the thick lees which fell to his lot. Thus replenished, they lit three torches of pitchy terebinth, which they had brought along in the sarcophagus. Yanur led the way, daring the tenebrous depths with drawn sword, and a torch flaming smokily in his left hand. His companions followed, bearing the sarcophagus, in which, by raising the hinged lid slightly, they had socketed the other torches. The potent wine of Yoros mounted within them, driving away their shadowy fears and apprehensions. All three were seasoned drinkers, and they moved with great care and circumspection, and did not stumble on the dim, uncertain steps.

Passing through a series of wine-cellars, full of cracked and sharded jars, they came at last, after many zigzag plungings of the stairs, to a vast corridor hewn in the nether syenite, below the level of the city streets. It stretched before them through illimitable gloom, its walls unshattered, and its roof admitting no crevice-filtered ray. It seemed that they had entered some impregnable citadel of the dead. On the right hand were the tombs of the elder kings; on the left were the sepulchers of the queens; and lateral passages led to a world of subsidiary vaults, reserved for other members of the royal family. At the farther end of the main hall they would find the burial-chamber of Tnepreez.

Yanur, following the right-hand wall, soon came to the first tomb. According to custom, its portals were open, and were lower than a man's stature, so that all who entered must bow in humbleness to death. Yanur held his torch to the lintel, and read stumblingly the legend graven in the stone, which told that the vault was that of King Acharnil, father of Agmeni.

"Verily," he said, "we shall find nothing here, other than the harmless dead." Then, the wine he had drunk impelling him to a sort of bravado, he stooped before the portals and thrust his flickering flambeau into the tomb of Acharnil.

Surprized, he swore a loud and soldierly oath, that made the others drop their burden and crowd behind him. Peering into the square, concamerated chamber, which had a kingly spaciousness, they saw that it was unoccupied by any visible tenant. The tall chair of mystically graven gold and ebony, in which the mummy should have sat crowned and robed as in life, was addorsed against the farther wall on a low dais. In it there lay an empty robe of sable and carmine, and a miter-shaped crown of silver set with black sapphires, as if the dead king had doffed them and had gone away!

Startled, with the wine dying swiftly in their brains, the warriors felt the crawling chill of an unknown mystery. Yanur, however, steeled himself to enter the vault. He examined the shadowy corners, he lifted and shook the raiment of Acharnil, but found no clue to the riddle of the mummy's disappearance. The tomb was clean of dust, and there was no sign nor faintest odor of mortal decay.

YANUR rejoined his comrades, and the three eyed one another in eery consternation. They resumed their exploring of the hall; and Yanur, as he came to the doorway of each tomb, paused before it and thrust his flambeau into the wavering

murk, only to discover an empty throne, and the cast-off regalia of royalty.

There was, it seemed, no reasonable explanation for the vanishing of the mummies, in whose preservation the powerful spices of the Orient had been employed, together with natron, rendering them virtually incorruptible. From the circumstances, it did not appear that they had been removed by human robbers, who would hardly have left behind the precious jewels, fabrics and metals; and it was even more unlikely that they had been devoured by animals: for in that case the bones would have remained, and the vestments would have been torn and disordered. The mythic terrors of Chaon Gacca began to assume a darker imminence; and the seekers peered and listened fearfully as they went on in the hushed sepulchral hall.

Presently, after they had verified the vacancy of more than a dozen tombs, they saw the glimmering of several steely objects before them on the floor of the corridor. These, on investigation, proved to be two swords, two helmets and cuirasses of a slightly antiquated type, such as had formerly been worn by the warriors of Tasuun. They might well have belonged to the unreturning bravos sent by King Mandis to retrieve the mirror of Avaina.

Yanur, Grotara and Thirlain Ludoch, viewing these sinister relics, were seized by an almost frantic desire to accomplish their errand and regain the sunlight. They hurried on, no longer pausing to inspect the separate tombs, and debating, as they went, the curious problem that would be presented if the mummy sought by Famorgh and Lunalia should have vanished like the others. The king had commanded them to fetch the remains of Tnepreez; and they knew that no excuse or explanation of their failure to do this would be accepted. Under such circumstances, their return to Miraab would be inadvisable; and the only safety would lie in flight beyond the northern desert, along the route of caravans to Zul-Bha-Sair or Xylac.

It seemed that they traversed an enormous distance, among the more ancient vaults. Here the formation of the stone was softer and more friable, and the earthquake had wrought considerable damage. The floor was littered with detritus, the sides and roof were full of fractures, and some of the chambers had partially fallen in, so that their vacancy was revealed to the casual peering of Yanur and his companions.

Nearing the hall's end they were confronted by a chasm, dividing both floor and roof, and slitting the sill and lintel of the last chamber. The gulf was about four feet wide, and the torch of Yanur could not disclose its bottom. He found the name of Tnepreez on the lintel, whose antique inscription, telling the deeds and titles of the king, had been sundered in twain by the cataclysm. Then, walking on a narrow ledge, he entered the vault. Grotara and Thirlain Ludoch crowded behind him, leaving the sarcophagus in the hall.

The sepulchral throne of Tnepreez, overturned and broken, was lying across the fissure that had rifted the whole tomb from side to side. There was no trace of the mummy, which, from the chair's inverted position, had doubtless fallen into those yawning depths in the hour of its overthrow.

Before the seekers could voice their disappointment and dismay, the silence about them was broken by a dull rumbling as of distant thunder. The stone trembled beneath their feet, the walls shook and wavered, and the rumbling noise, in long, shuddering undula-

tions, grew louder and more ominous. The solid floor appeared to rise and flow with a continuous, sickening motion; and then, as they turned to flee, it seemed that the universe came down upon them in a roaring deluge of night and ruin.

GROTARA, wakening in darkness, was aware of an agonizing burden, as if some monumental shaft were builded on his crushed feet and lower legs. His head throbbed and ached as if from the stroke of a stunning mace. He found that his arms and body were free; but the pain in his extremities became insufferable, causing him to swoon anew, when he tried to drag them from beneath their incumbrance.

Terror closed upon him like the clutch of ghoulish fingers as he realized his situation. An earthquake, such as had caused the abandonment of Chaon Gacca, had occurred; and he and his fellows were entombed in the catacombs. He called aloud, repeating the names of Yanur and Thirlain Ludoch many times; but there was no groan nor rustle to assure him that they still lived.

Reaching out with his right hand, he encountered numerous pieces of rubble. Slewing himself toward them, he found several boulder-sized fragments of stone, and among them a smooth and roundish thing, with a sharp ridge in the center, which he knew for the crested helmet worn by one of his companions. Even with the most painful striving, he could reach no farther, and was unable to identify the owner. The metal was heavily dented, and the comb was bent as if by the impact of some ponderous mass.

In spite of his predicament, the fierce nature of Grotara refused to yield itself to despair. He drew himself to a sitting position, and, doubling forward, he contrived to reach the enormous block that had fallen across his nether limbs. He pushed against it with herculean effort, raging like a trapped lion, but the mass was immovable. For hours, it seemed, he strove as if with some monstrous cacodemon. His frenzy was calmed only by exhaustion. He lay back at length; and the darkness weighed upon him like a live thing, and seemed to gnaw him with fangs of pain and horror.

Delirium hovered near, and he thought that he heard a dim and hideous humming, far below in the stony bowels of the earth. The noise grew louder, as if ascending from a riven hell. He became aware of a wan, unreal light that wavered above him, disclosing in doubtful glimpses the shattered roof. The light strengthened; and lifting himself a little, he saw that it poured from the earthquake chasm in the floor.

It was a light such as he had never seen: a livid luster, that was not the reflection of lamp or torch or firebrand. Somehow, as if the senses of hearing and sight were confused, he identified it with the hideous humming.

Like a sourceless dawn, the luminosity crept upon the ruin wrought by the temblor. Grotara saw that the whole entrance of the tomb, and much of its concameration, had caved in. A fragment, striking him on the head, had knocked him senseless; and a huge section of the roof had fallen across his extremities.

The bodies of Thirlain Ludoch and Yanur were lying close to the broadened chasm. Both, he felt sure, were dead. The grizzled beard of Thirlain Ludoch was dark and stiff with blood that had run down from the crushed cranium; and Yanur was half buried in a pile of blocks and detritus, from which his torso and left arm were emergent. His torch had

burned itself out in his stiffly clutching fingers, as if a blackened socket.

All this Grotara noted in a dream-like manner. Then he perceived the real source of the strange illumination. A coldly shining, hueless globe, round as a puffball and large as a human head, had risen from the fissure and was hovering above it like a mimic moon. The thing oscillated with a slight but ceaseless vibratory motion. From it, as if caused by this vibration, the heavy humming poured, and the light fell in ever-trembling waves.

A dim awe was upon Grotara; but he felt no terror. It seemed that the light and sound were woven upon his senses like some Lethean spell. Rigid he sat, forgetful of his pain and despair, while the globe hovered for a few instants above the chasm, and then floated slowly and horizontally, till it hung directly over the upturned features of Yanur.

With the same deliberate slowness, the same ceaseless oscillation, it descended upon the face and neck of the dead man, which appeared to melt away like tallow as the globe settled lower and lower. The humming deepened, the globe flamed with an eerier luster, and its death-like pallor was mottled with an impure iris. It swelled and bloated obscenely, while the whole head of the warrior shrank within the helmet, and the plates of his cuirass fell in as if the very torso were shrivelling beneath them.

Grotara's eyes beheld the horrific vision clearly, but his brain was numbed as if by a merciful hemlock. It was hard to remember, hard to think . . . but somehow he recalled the empty tombs, the ownerless crowns and vestments. The enigma of the missing mummies, over which he and his companions had puzzled vainly, was not resolved. But the thing that battened upon Yanur was beyond all mortal knowledge or surmise. It was some ghoulish denizen of a nether world, set free by the demons of earthquake.

Now, in the catalepsy that thralled him, he saw the gradual settling of the piled debris in which the legs and hips of Yanur were inhumed. The helmet and body-mail were like empty shards, the outflung arm had withered, had shortened, and the very bones were dwindling away, appearing to melt and liquefy. The globe had grown enormous. It was flushed with unclean ruby, like a vampire moon. From it there issued palpable ropes and filaments, pearly, shuddering into strange colors, that appeared to fasten themselves to the ruined floor and walls and roof, like the weaving of a spider. Thickly and more thickly they multiplied, forming a curtain between Grotara and the chasm, and falling upon Thirlain Ludoch and himself, till he saw the sanguine burning of the globe as through arabesques of baleful opal.

Now the web had filled the entire tomb. It ran and glistened with a hundred changing hues, it dripped with glories drawn from the spectrum of dissolution. It bloomed with ghostly blossoms, and foliages that grew and faded as if by necromancy. The eyes of Grotara were blinded; more and more he was meshed in the weird web. Unearthly, chill as the fingers of death, its gossamers clung and quivered upon his face and hands.

He could not tell the duration of the weaving, the term of his enthrallment. Dimly, at last, he beheld the thinning of the luminous threads, the retraction of the trembling arabesques. The globe, a thing of evil beauty, alive and aware in some holocryptic fashion, had risen now from the empty armor of Yanur. Diminishing to its former size, and putting off its colors of blood and opal, it hung for

a little above the chasm. Grotara felt that it was watching him . . . was watching Thirlain Ludoch. Then, like a satellite of the nether caverns, it fell slowly into the fissure, and the light faded from the tomb and left Grotara in deepening darkness.

AFTER that, there were ages of fever, thirst and madness, of torment and slumber, and recurrent strugglings against the fallen block that held him prisoner. He babbled insanely, he howled like a wolf; or, lying supine and silent, he heard the multitudinous, muttering voices of ghouls that conspired against him. Gangrening swiftly, his crushed extremities seemed to throb like those of a Titan. He drew his sword with the strength of delirium, and endeavored to saw himself free at the shins, only to swoon from loss of blood.

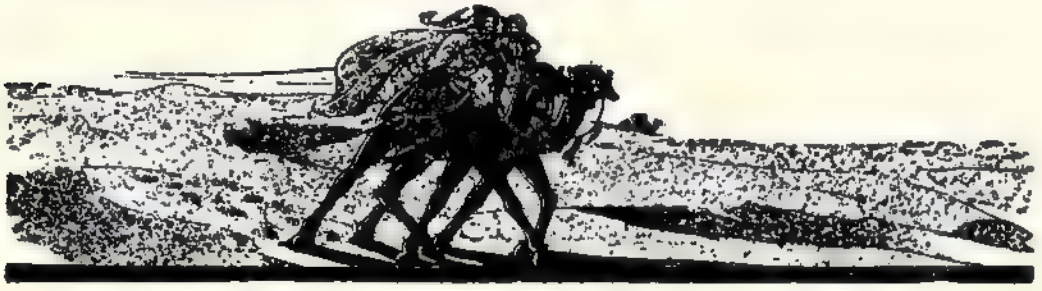
Awakening feebly, and scarce able to lift his head, he saw that the light had returned, and heard once more the incessant vibrant humming that filled the vault. His mind was clear, and a weak terror stirred within him: for he knew that the Weaver had risen again from the chasm . . . and knew the reason of its coming.

He turned his head laboriously, and watched the glowing ball as it hung and oscillated, and then came down in leisurely descent on the face of Thirlain Ludoch. Again he saw it bloat obscenely, like a blood-flushed moon, fed with the wasting of the old warrior's body. Again, with dazzled eyes, he beheld the weaving of the web of impure iris, patterned with deathly splendor, veiling the ruinous catacomb with its weird illusions. Again, like a dying beetle, he was meshed in its chill, unearthly strands; and its necromantic flowers, blooming and perishing, latticed the void air above him. But, ere the retracting of the web, his delirium came upon him and brought a demon-peopled darkness; and the Weaver finished its toil unseen, and returned unheeded to the chasm.

He tossed in the hells of fever, or lay at the black, undivined nadir of oblivion. But death tarried, still aloof; and he lived on by virtue of his youth and giant strength. Once more, toward the end, his senses cleared, and he saw for the third time the unholy light and heard again the odious humming. The Weaver was poised above him, pale, shining and vibrant . . . and he knew that it was waiting for him to die.

Lifting his sword with weak fingers, he sought to drive it away. But the thing hovered, alert and vigilant, beyond his reach; and he thought that it watched him like a vulture. The sword dropped from his hand. The luminous horror did not depart. It drew nearer, like an eyeless, pertinacious face; and it seemed to follow him, swooping through the ultimate night as he fell deathward.

With none to behold the glory of its weaving, with darkness before and after, the Weaver spun its final web in the tomb of Tnepreez.



The Vampire Master

By HUGH DAVIDSON

"Newton crashed through the window and lunged toward them."

A thrilling novel of corpses that would not stay dead, and a gruesome horror in the hills of New York

The Story Thus Far

"VAMPIRISM is going on in my village!" This statement has brought Doctor John Dale, specialist in evil, and his assistant, Harley Owen, who tells the story, to the village of Maysville in the New York Catskills. There with Doctor Henderson, who summoned them, they are fighting the visitation of vampires, dead men and women reanimated by evil forces and preying on the living at night by sucking their blood.

Two hundred years before, the Maysville region was terrorized by a vampire, one Gerritt Geisert, who had been forced to flee. Now that Gerritt Geisert, still strong in vampire-life, has returned to prey again on the region. He has vampirized Allene Ralton, wife of James Ralton and mother of Olivia and Virginia

This story began in WEIRD TALES for October

Ralton, sucking her blood until she died. Dying, she became herself a vampire and now has come back to prey on her eldest daughter, Olivia.

Doctor Dale strives to protect Olivia Ralton from her dead vampire-mother and Gerritt Geisert. He finds that Allene Ralton's coffin and body are not in the cemetery where they were entombed but were taken by Geisert out to the ancient Geisert manor, one of a number of long-abandoned Colonial manors in the hills. There the bodies of Geisert, Allene Ralton, and Arthur Newton (a young man whom Geisert vampirized also and who also has become vampire), lie during the day, while at night they come to the village and neighboring estates to prey on their victims.

Doctor Dale and Owen and others go out to the old Geisert place, but though they see the three vampires wake there at sunset and go forth, returning before morning, they are unable to break through the stone wall behind which their bodies lie hidden by day. They return to the village to get tools to enable them to do so.

There another vampire victim comes to their notice, a girl, Alice Wilsey, who was formerly fiancée of the dead Arthur Newton. She is being vampirized by her dead lover, willingly giving him her blood. In the end she dies from Newton's vampirism and Doctor Dale and Owen drive a stake through her body and sever her head to prevent her from becoming a vampire also.

Meanwhile Olivia Ralton also has died, from the vampirism of Allene Ralton and Gerritt Geisert. Before Dale and Owen can use stake and steel on her body she has become a vampire, escaping by night with her coffin by Gerritt Geisert's help, so that now, in some new hiding-place in the old manors in the hills, the bodies of Geisert, the vampire master, and his three vampire followers, Allene Ralton, Olivia Ralton and Arthur Newton, lie during the day and come forth at night.

Doctor Dale warns James Ralton and his remaining daughter, Virginia, that it is possible the vampires will try to vampirize Virginia also, and has them place safeguards against this about the doors and windows of the Ralton mansion. Then Dale and Owen return to Henderson's house in the village, where they begin that night making cross-shaped bullets which they hope will prove potent against Gerritt Geisert and his vampire-followers, ordinary bullets being useless. If they can paralyze the vampires with the cross-bullets, they can then end their activities for ever with stake and steel.

---

13. Called Forth

DALE showed me the plan upon which he was proceeding. He was fashioning a little copper mold. Bullets cast in it would be cylindrical at one end, to fit into an ordinary cartridge, but at the other end would be shaped like a small cross, the cross-end smaller than the cylindrical end so that the bullet could be fired out of an ordinary pistol-barrel.

The fashioning of the little mold was extraordinarily difficult by reason of the shape, and while Doctor Dale worked at it, Henderson and I prepared heater and lead and ladle for casting the bullets when the mold was finished. We worked on at this in Doctor Henderson's white-lit little laboratory, hour following hour.

It was a little after eleven when the telephone-bell rang. Henderson answered, then handed the instrument to Doctor Dale.

"It's Ralton!" he said. Dale took it quickly.

We could hear James Ralton's excited voice from the receiver. "Dale, the serv-

ants all left us hours ago! They sneaked away—Virginia and I just discovered we're alone in the house. And we just glimpsed shapes of some kind out in the grounds!"

"You have the crosses and garlic-branches at all the doors and windows as I said?" Dale asked sharply.

"Yes, but we may have missed one or two, there are so many. Virginia and I are here in the music-room—we tried to get Hugh Rillard but couldn't locate him, so we called you. Wait a minute!" There was a moment's silence and then Ralton's voice again, more excited. "Virginia says she hears a sound at the back of the house! I hear something there, too!"

"We'll be out there as fast as we can come!" Doctor Dale cried. "Don't go out of the house for any reason nor——"

"Dale, there's something in the house!" Ralton's frantic voice interrupted. "Some one got in the back and is coming through —coming along the hall——"

From the receiver came faintly a terrible scream in the voice of Virginia Ralton! Then a cry from James Ralton, not to us, though he must have still held the telephone, since we heard it—"Oh, God——!"

There was a crash and then silence. Doctor Dale jabbed the receiver-hook fiercely but no answer came. He leapt hatless for the door, Henderson and I with him.

"The car!" he cried. "Something terrible has happened out there——"

In a minute our car was roaring out of Maysville's dim-lit streets westward into the night. Dale drove with utter recklessness, the car rocking and swaying as we rounded turns at unchecked speed, Henderson and I crouching in the seat bedside him.

Our speeding machine with its fan of yellow light preceding it split the night like a meteor. The miles between the village and the Ralton estate unreeled in the darkness behind it with dizzying velocity.

THE gates of the Ralton estate were open and as we dashed through them we saw that the little lodge beside them was dark and deserted by its keeper. The big Ralton mansion too was mostly dark, but there were some lights on its lower floor.

The car stopped with brakes squealing, and we burst out of it and up to the door, whipping crosses from our pockets.

The door was locked! Dale leapt to one of the windows and shattered the glass with a kick. We plunged through into the drawing-room.

In a moment we were in the hall and raced down it to the music-room opening from its rear end.

The music-room was alight. James Ralton lay sprawled in its corner over the fallen telephone, his face distorted and body unmoving. Virginia Ralton was in a heap at the room's center, motionless, too.

Doctor Dale bent first over Ralton, but one look at his motionless body and his terribly distorted face and staring eyes was enough. "Dead!" Dale said. "No injuries or marks on his throat. But Virginia——"

We raised Virginia Ralton in our arms. Her face was deathly white but she was breathing, in long sighs. On her white throat stood out two crimson punctures, a tiny trickle of blood still flowing from them.

"She's lost blood, and we'll have to give her a Klein-Lorentz injection at once!" Doctor Dale exclaimed. "The case is in the car, Owen."

I ran out and in a moment was back with the case. Swiftly we made the in-

jection, Henderson too dazed to help us, and as the stimulating solution shot through her pillaged veins, Virginia Ralton stirred.

In moments her eyes opened, she stared up at us for a second, then screamed. Again and again she screamed.

It took many minutes of hard work on Doctor Dale's part before her awful terror quieted in any degree. Doctor Henderson had gripped himself enough to examine James Ralton, and came over to us.

"He died of shock, I think," he said. "There's no sign of any other cause."

Virginia Ralton nodded unsteadily. "Yes, I saw it. Father just gave an awful cry and crumpled up — when he saw them——"

"Saw whom?" Dale asked her swiftly. "Who was here, Virginia? Who made these marks on your throat?"

She shuddered violently. "It was Gerritt Geisert and with him were—mother and Olivia! They all—were at my throat——"

In minutes more she was able to speak coherently. "We had found that we two were all alone here, the servants having sneaked away in fear sometime this evening, and we thought we saw moving shapes approaching the house through the grounds. We were scared and tried to get Hugh Rillard but couldn't locate him. So father at once called you.

"While he was talking with you on the telephone we heard some sounds at the back of the house, like those of a window being forced open. We had placed crosses and garlic at the windows and doors as you said—that's what scared the servants into leaving—but must have missed one of the windows at the back, there being so many.

"There came steps along the hall and in a moment Gerritt Geisert and mother and Olivia entered the room! Their faces and eyes were—terrible, mother and Olivia as terrible-looking as Geisert. Father, when he saw mother and Olivia together like that, cried 'Oh, God!' and choked as though trying to say something, then crumpled to the floor.

"Mother and Olivia laughed at that! And so did Geisert! I stood petrified by utter horror, and then Olivia leapt at me, grasped me! I screamed as her sharp teeth penetrated my neck, but as I felt my blood draining into her sucking mouth I was unable to resist. She was torn from me in a moment by mother. But mother then fastened her own mouth on my throat!

"The horror of it was causing my senses to fail when mother in turn was pushed from me by Gerritt Geisert. Holding me, he said to the other two—'You get no more tonight. A little for myself and then we must be gone, for Newton is waiting outside and I think some one will be here soon. There will be plenty of time in the future to take her blood.'

"Saying that, Geisert plunged his own head down against my throat. And as I felt more of my blood streaming from me, my senses gave way completely and I became unconscious. I knew nothing until I woke just now with you over me."

"It is what I feared!" Dale groaned. "But I thought they could be held off until we made the cross-bullets and could meet them!"

"Doctor, will I be like Olivia—and mother?" Virginia Ralton asked unsteadily. "Will I die and yet not be dead, be as they are?"

"You'll not, I swear it!" The exclamation was wrung from the depths of Dale's feelings. "Virginia, if Gerritt Geisert and those others are destroyed, this vampire-taint will pass from you; and

they are going to be destroyed, they must be!"

THERE sounded quick steps in the hall, and we sprang erect. But it was a young man with wondering expression who entered. I recognized him as Hugh Rillard.

"What's been happening——" he began, then saw the girl and leapt to her side. "Virginia! What's the matter?"

She put a hand over her face, but did not answer. Rillard looked bewilderedly at us, then with widening eyes at James Ralton's body.

Briefly Doctor Dale recounted to him the dark evil that was pursuing the vampire-haunted Raltons, that had made vampires of Allene and Olivia Ralton, had taken the lives of James Ralton and Edward Harmon, and that had now fastened upon Virginia Ralton.

"But isn't there something we can *do?*" burst out Hugh Rillard when Dale had finished. "Some way of fighting this Gerritt Geisert and the rest?"

"There is a way, yes," Dale said quickly, "and we were preparing it when Ralton called us."

He explained how we were fabricating cross-shaped bullets for use against Geisert and his vampire-satellites. "And it may be that this vampirizing of Virginia, terrible as it is, will give us a way of striking at the vampires."

"What do you mean, Dale?" asked Doctor Henderson.

"I mean that it is almost sure that once having taken some of Virginia's blood, Geisert and the rest will come back to vampirize her again. Very well, we will take up headquarters in this house from now on and each night will lie in wait for the vampires with pistols loaded with cross-shaped bullets. And with those bullets we can destroy them!"

"Count me in with you on this!" said Hugh Rillard determinedly. "I'm not going to leave here while Virginia's in danger."

"Good, that will make four of us and we can guard all sides of the house at night," Dale said. "And we'll not leave Virginia unguarded until Gerritt Geisert and the rest are destroyed.

"Owen can go back into the village to get the mold and implements we were working on," he said, "and before tomorrow night—tonight I should say, as it's almost morning—we'll have some of the cross-bullets ready to use. They may not come so soon again as tonight but if they do we'll be ready for them.

"And it will be a far better chance of coming to grips with Geisert and the other vampires than if we were to go out into the hills to search for them, as there is no telling where in that valley their bodies lie by day, and we might search for weeks without finding them."

DOCTOR HENDERSON and I drove back into the village and procured the bullet-making equipment which Doctor Dale wanted, also the sacks of stakes and tools and some other objects he specified. When we returned to the Ralton estate we brought also a coffin to hold temporarily the body of James Ralton.

It was well into the morning when we returned. Virginia was sleeping, young Rillard guarding her though she was safe enough by day, and Dale and Henderson and I placed James Ralton's body in the coffin and set it in the library, upon the same stand that so short a time before had held Olivia Ralton's coffin until Geisert had taken it.

Then we went at the work of making the cross-shaped bullets. Doctor Dale finished his little copper mold, and after some trials and errors we succeeded in

casting bullets that were cylindrical at one end like any other bullet but that at the other end, the nose, were shaped like little crosses. We made several dozen of these and fitted them into cartridges from which we removed the ordinary bullets, then tested them from each of the four pistols we had brought.

The cross-bullets seemed fired as effectively as any other bullet from the pistols. We loaded the guns with them, Henderson and Dale and Rillard and I each taking one, and then our preparations were complete. Only actual test could show whether they would be as effective against Gerritt Geisert and his followers as we thought, though it seemed certain that they should be.

Dale and Henderson and I got some sleep then, it being midafternoon, telling Rillard to wake us before sunset. The sun was just setting when he did so.

We ate a somewhat sketchy dinner which in the absence of servants we had to prepare ourselves, and then Doctor Dale outlined to us his plan of action.

"I want you, Miss Virginia, to wait inside the house," he said, "with enough lights going to show that you are here.

"We four will lie hidden in the shrubbery around the house, each of us guarding a different side of it. If Geisert and the rest come tonight to prey upon you, as I think they will, we'll be ready for them with our pistols, and our cross-bullets will end all these vampires."

Virginia Ralton was very white. "You're sure—sure—that they won't be able to get in at me?" she asked.

"I am sure!" Doctor Dale said emphatically. "You will be quite safe, Virginia, but will be acting as a bait to lure these vampires to their end.

"It's dark now," he added, glancing from the window. "We may as well take our positions, though I do not expect them to come much before midnight."

The next minutes were busy ones. Dale snapped on a few lights in the lower floor of the house, just enough to show that the house was still occupied. He then had Virginia take her position in a big chair in the drawing-room, near a floor-lamp that would show her clearly to any one peering from a distance through the window.

That done, we four proceeded to take our own places. Doctor Dale chose to guard the house's northern side, Henderson taking the south, Rillard the west and I the east. We secreted ourselves in the thick shrubbery at the base of the house, and Dale inspected our locations before taking his own. He told us that any cry or shot from any side should bring us all to that side at once.

Doctor Dale spoke to me last before going to his own place at the house's northern side.

"Take no chances tonight, Owen," he warned. "The moment you see them approaching, fire. Try above all to get Gerritt Geisert."

"I will," I promised. His face was very grave.

"This is the best chance we may ever have to end the black devil's work Geisert has been spreading here. We must not fail!"

Dale left me, and then the silence of the night was unbroken around the big house at whose four sides we crouched.

Hidden uncomfortably in the thick shrubbery, I waited with pistol ready in my hand, gazing out into the estate's grounds. I could not see for any great distance, so dense was the darkness under the great trees of the grounds, the moon having not yet risen.

In the dark bulk of the mansion behind me glowed the few illuminated windows

we had purposely left lit. I wondered how this dreadful, silent wait was affecting Virginia Ralton inside, who had most to fear of any of us.

And dreadful enough was that watch in silence and darkness for all of us—a watch for a vampire crew and a vampire master whose evil powers we had come to know well. The trembling Virginia in the house, with the taint of the vampire's victim already on her, the dead James Ralton lying in another room, bore witness to their powers.

And so too did Edward Harmon, lying crushed and dead in his own home, and Alice Wilsey, lying in hers with the marks of our dreadful but necessary work upon her body. And even three of those for whom we now waited, Allene and Olivia Ralton and Arthur Newton, bore witness to the hellish power of Gerritt Geisert, who had drawn them into the dark web of evil of which he was the center.

I clutched my pistol tighter, crouching, waiting. Upon these pistols and their cross-shaped bullets depended all tonight. I listened constantly for some sound of alarm from the other sides of the house, for it was wearing on toward midnight; but no sound came and I waited on like the others. Was Geisert not coming this night after all? Now I saw that the moon was rising.

TIME passed slowly in that tense wait, hour following hour. The radium dial of my watch told me it was almost three hours past midnight, and no alarm yet had been sounded, when I heard a low call from the northern side of the house, from Doctor Dale.

At once I hurried to him, and found Doctor Henderson and Rillard hastily answering his summons also.

"You three have seen nothing?" asked Dale tensely. "They surely would have come by now if they were coming."

We shook our heads. "Strange!" said Dale. "I was certain they'd come again to prey upon Virginia tonight. I hope this terrible waiting isn't making her too nervous."

"Didn't you see her a few hours ago?" Rillard asked in surprize. "I thought she came back in through the northern door."

"Came back in?" Doctor Dale gripped Rillard's shoulder with sudden fierceness. "What do you mean? Did Virginia go out of the house?"

"Why, yes, before midnight!" said Rillard bewilderedly. "She told me she was going to walk around the house for a breath of air when she went out the west door, and when she didn't come back in that door I supposed she'd re-entered the house through the north door."

Without a word Dale dashed into the house. We followed hastily. The drawing-room was empty of Virginia Ralton and neither did a swift search through the whole house find her.

"She's gone!" cried Doctor Dale. He turned on Hugh Rillard. "What did she look like when she came out? Was there anything strange in her manner?"

Rillard looked at us with anxious eyes. "Why, she did seem a little strange in manner, she spoke and moved in a way that seemed to me rather stiff and mechanical. But I thought she was just wrought up by the tenseness of the waiting, as she might well be."

Dale groaned. "Why didn't I look for this? Gerritt Geisert has been too much for us again. Instead of coming in with his vampires to prey on Virginia tonight, as we thought he would, he has called her out to them, wherever their new lair is in the hills!"

"Called her out? But how could he——" Rillard attempted.

"Easily enough!" Dale exclaimed. "She is a victim of Geisert and the others and as their victim can be controlled by their wills, even from a distance, just as Olivia Ralton when still living was controlled from outside her room by the wills of her mother and Geisert.

"Quick, to the car! We've no time to lose here now—if Virginia Ralton left here before midnight she must have reached that vampire nest out there some time ago! We've got to go out there after her!"

14. The Struggle

OUR car shot out from the Ralton estate and headed toward the hills. Hugh Rillard drove, and the speed at which we raced through the moonlit countryside and his white face were evidence enough of the self-accusing anxiety he felt at having let Virginia Ralton go forth.

Doctor Dale leaned forward. "Heaven knows whether we can find Gerritt Geisert's new lair at all!" he exclaimed. "Henderson and Owen and I searched the whole lower end of that valley night before last without locating it."

"We've got to find it!" Young Rillard flung the words back jerkily without turning. "If they've killed Virginia——"

"She had blood enough to stand their vampirism tonight, I think," Dale said, "though there's no telling about such matters."

The dark hills loomed close ahead in the moonlight, and as the road grew narrower and bumpier and finally impassable, Rillard stopped the car and we hastily emerged and pressed on on foot.

As we stumbled along the unused road into the first hills, faint streaks of dawn were showing in the sky behind us, gradually creeping across the heavens and paling the moonlight.

We had gone about half a mile into the hills by the old road and were about the same distance still from the valley of deserted manors, when we halted at sight of a figure approaching us from ahead. Exclamations burst from us as it came closer. It was Virginia Ralton!

She was walking toward us as stiffly and mechanically as though she were some puppet moved by clockwork. Her face and skin were marble-white, her lips colorless, and her eyes stared straight ahead unseeingly as she came on. Her dress and stockings were torn by brush and briars and her slippers were stained by dirt and dew.

"Virginia!" cried Rillard and sprang toward her, but Doctor Dale grasped him and held him back. The girl took absolutely no notice of him or any of us.

"Do not wake her now!" Dale warned. "She is still under the vampire's spell, but when the sun rises she will wake of herself. We will follow her until then."

We let Virginia pass us, then walked on directly behind her. Her unseeing eyes never wavered in our direction; she walked on stiffly.

"Dale, what does it mean?" Henderson cried. "She's heading back toward her home!"

Doctor Dale nodded. "Geisert and the rest called her out to them so as to avoid the risk of coming in to visit her. That of itself shows they are not too confident of their invulnerability. They took from her what blood they wanted—you see how white and bloodless she is—then sent her back home so that her visit to them would not be discovered."

Hugh Rillard turned, his face passionate. "I'm going out there and search them out now!" he cried, but Dale held him.

"Not now," Doctor Dale said. "We've Virginia here to care for now, and

besides, I have a better plan than that. But look—the sun is rising!"

It was true. Ahead of us the sun's golden disk was lifting and its rays were bright in our eyes.

As the sun lifted, Virginia Ralton's mechanical walking forward stopped. She hesitated a moment, then went suddenly limp and would have fallen to the ground but for our catching her.

"Quick, we've got to get her to the car and back to her home!" Doctor Dale said. "She's released now from the vampires' will and has lost much blood!"

HUGH RILLARD and I carried the unconscious girl between us and we all hastened out of the hills and to the car. Then while Rillard held her in his arms, I drove back toward the Ralton estate as hurriedly as we had come.

Virginia had not come to consciousness by the time we reached the estate, and her face was still alarmingly white, her breathing slow and labored.

We placed her on a sofa in the drawing-room and Doctor Dale swiftly injected into her again the Klein-Lorentz solution which, while unable really to replace lost blood, acted as a powerful stimulant as it coursed through the wasted veins.

We all breathed more easily when the girl sighed and weakly opened her eyes. She looked bewilderedly up at us, then must have felt her own weakness, for terror suffused her face.

"They were here again?" she cried weakly. "They got in at me, then?"

"No, Virginia," Dale answered. "They did not come at all, but they called you out there to them."

Briefly he told her what had happened, and the terror on her face deepened as she heard.

"I remember now!" she exclaimed. "I was sitting here in the drawing-room, waiting and terribly afraid even though you four were watching outside. Then as I waited a strange force seemed to descend on me—I felt my limbs moving without command of my will, *against* command of my will! It was as though another will had stepped into my body and was taking command of it.

"I seemed to lose consciousness but was dimly aware that I was walking out of the door, was making some explanation to Hugh, and then walking rapidly out through the grounds and along the road—walking—walking. . . .

"Then the only thing else I can remember is faces around me, cruel, white faces with gloating red eyes. Mother's face and Olivia's swam among them somehow, and clearest of them all was Gerritt Geisert's. I was dimly aware of a pain in my throat, and then knew nothing more at all, as though my own will had been completely overpowered."

Doctor Dale rose, his eyes intense. "Virginia, you've had a terrible experience," he said, "but I'm afraid that one as terrible lies still ahead of you."

"What do you mean?" she asked. "Surely you can keep them from calling me out there again, doctor? You must—you can lock me up or tie me up or something!"

Dale shook his head. "On the contrary," he asserted, "if Gerritt Geisert and his vampires call you out there again this coming night, we are going to let you go!"

Hugh Rillard got to his feet, his face flaming. "Like hell we are!" he cried. "It's my fault she went out to that hellnest of vampires once, but she's not going again!"

Dale's eyes were like brown ice. "Rillard, she must go again! Don't you see what I'm driving at? If we let her go at their call and follow her, she'll lead us

straight to Gerritt Geisert and the rest, and with our pistols and cross-bullets we can end them once and for all!"

Doctor Henderson nodded eagerly. "He's right, Hugh! Geisert and the rest will undoubtedly call her out there again, and we might search out there ourselves for weeks without finding them."

"But what if Geisert were too much for us again?" cried Rillard. "He was tonight and could be again, and we'd have sacrificed Virginia's life—more than her life—for nothing!"

"Rillard, I don't say that there's no risk of that," Doctor Dale said gravely. "Yet we must take that risk. Think! We may be able by keeping constant watch over Virginia to keep Geisert and his vampires from getting at her again, but what will be the result? Those four fiends will turn to new victims!

"They will vampirize new victims whom we may not even know of, and who can become vampires in turn after their deaths. So this circle of evil will widen still further, and will become so great that it will be beyond our control. For Geisert aims to be vampire master of hundreds, of thousands, and unless we take this chance to destroy him and his satellites, he will be!"

"But I can't let Virginia go!" groaned Rillard. "I'd go gladly myself, but she——"

Virginia interrupted him. "I am going to do as Doctor Dale says!" she said, her face pale but determined. "He's right, Hugh—it's the only way in which this thing can be stopped, and mother and Olivia made truly dead!"

Dale caught her hand. "You are a brave girl," he exclaimed. "I know what terror you must feel at the idea of repeating last night's experience, Virginia, but it will not be the same. We four will be close behind you, and Geisert and the others will not have time to harm you before we attack them."

"But what will we do?" asked Hugh Rillard, his face working. "Just wait here tonight until Virginia is called out there and follow?"

"Just that," Dale said. "But we must have everything ready when night comes.

"I think," he added solemnly, "that tonight will decide this terrible struggle one way or another. Either we will conquer and destroy Gerritt Geisert and his minions once and for all, or he will add another to the list of his vampire-victims and show that he is too strong for us to hope ever to overcome."

The knowledge of this held us tense through the hours of that day. During the morning hours Virginia lay in exhausted sleep, Rillard and I taking turns in watching over her while Doctor Dale and Doctor Henderson got some sleep.

In the afternoon we reversed the procedure and while Henderson watched the still-sleeping Virginia, and Doctor Dale busied himself in his preparations for the night, Rillard and I snatched some troubled sleep. Even in my sleep the knowledge that we soon must face Gerritt Geisert and his satellites in decisive combat dominated my mind.

DOCTOR DALE woke Rillard and me an hour before sunset. Virginia had wakened, and Rillard prepared a hurried meal for all of us.

I noted that Virginia wore a skirt of white flannel and a white jacket, and Dale saw my eyes upon her garb.

"I told Virginia to wear white clothing," he said, "as it will make her easier to follow tonight."

The girl whitened but said nothing. "We will act as follows," continued Doctor Dale. "Before sunset we will tie

Virginia's hands and feet. If the vampires out there order her to come to them before midnight, as they did last night, we'll not let her go but will wait a few hours before releasing her.

"The reason is that then she, and we who will be following her, will get out there to wherever the vampire nest is in that valley, not much before sunrise. That turns the time-element in our favor, for even should Gerritt Geisert and the other three be too strong for us, they will hardly have time before sunrise to seek a new hiding-place for their coffins and bodies.

"When we follow Virginia out there we will take with us, besides our pistols with their cross-bullets, the sack containing the stakes and tools and also garlic-branches. With all these we should be able to overcome Geisert and the rest, or at least prevent them from escaping. If we can not—but we must not think of failure!"

We rose from the table. "The sun is hanging over the western horizon now," Dale said, pointing at the window. "It is time we secured Virginia."

We went into the drawing-room and the girl seated herself in a chair. Then Doctor Dale quickly bound her hands and feet securely with thin rope, not so tightly as to hurt her but too tightly for her to make any movement out of the chair.

The sun set rapidly after we finished, and as twilight's dusk invaded the house Dale snapped on the lights, and drew chairs around that of Virginia. The sack containing the tools and stakes and garlic lay close at hand.

"We'll wait here around you, Virginia," he told the girl. "There is a possibility that instead of calling you out there, Gerritt Geisert and the rest may come in here again, but I do not look for it. I am confident that all will be as last night."

"I'm not afraid with you all around me," Virginia said, but her face was very pale. Hugh Rillard took her bound hands in his, and she smiled bravely at him.

OF ALL the terrible vigils that had been ours since Dale and I had come to Maysville to fight the vampire menace, that was most terrible. A watch and wait it was for the dread vampire-summons to come to this girl in our midst, a summons from her own dead vampire mother and sister and from that dread vampire master, Gerritt Geisert, whose black nets of two-hundred-year-old evil had made of three innocent people after death hell-fiends lusting for the blood of their kin and kind.

And as time dragged slowly on, our watch was made the more terrible by the presence with us in the house of the dead James Ralton, lying still in his coffin in the library. So aware of his presence I was that as I seemed to hear with strained ears slight sounds from the library, I began to wonder whether or not even James Ralton, though not a vampire victim, might not arise from his coffin at some outside command, to work against us.

Doctor Dale looked constantly at his watch, and every few minutes walked around the room, peering out its windows, but never leaving the room. The rest of us sat unmoving in our chairs around Virginia. Doctor Henderson was as white almost as the girl, and I wondered inwardly how much more of this horror the elderly physician could stand. He was an altogether different-looking person from the Henderson who had visited Doctor Dale and me in our New York office.

It lacked an hour of midnight when our wait was first rewarded with results. Virginia suddenly stiffened in her chair.

Her eyes expanded and her whole face was shadowed by a series of swift changes. An unfamiliar listening expression dropped on it, and her gray eyes became strange.

She strained at her bonds, sought to rise. Her ankles and wrists were cut by the thin ropes as with all her strength she sought to break them. Her eyes blazed in alien hatred at our own, and her face was utterly unlike the normal Virginia's; her mouth was a cruel red square.

"They're calling her!" Doctor Dale exclaimed. "Gerritt Geisert's will has hold of her now!"

"Let me go!" Virginia was crying, almost screaming. "I want to go!" Her body thrashed wildly in the chair.

"Hold her in the chair!" Dale directed, and Rillard and I held her down as he ordered. Her strange eyes glared into ours, and in her fury she spat at us!

For minutes she struggled wildly, then subsided and lay bound in the chair with hate blazing from her eyes.

Then again she was struggling furiously, screeching, screaming, the call from out there in the vampire-haunted hills strong upon her. Her efforts to free herself were so wild that it took three of us to hold her in the chair. Dale watched with stern determination.

These periods of alternate raging struggle and breathless subsidence went on, past midnight and past one o'clock, while still we held her. Then abruptly she seemed to collapse in her chair, and hung limp in our grasp.

In a moment she stirred weakly, and opened her eyes. The savagery had left her face and it seemed normal. She looked in wondering fashion at us.

"Did something happen?" she asked. "But I'm all right now. Only these ropes hurt my ankles—loosen them, Hugh."

Rillard with an exclamation of relief bent to do so, and was knocked aside by a sweep of Doctor Dale's arm.

"No!" cried Dale. "Don't you see it's the vampire will holding her still, shamming? Look at her!"

The animal-like fury was again on Virginia's face at seeing her ruse thus balked. She struggled madly again, striking us with her bound hands until, panting, we again held her tightly.

"In a half-hour more we'll release her," Dale said. "She'll make straight for the hills."

Virginia had become quiet. She was not looking at us now but was looking past us, head erect, a strange listening expression on her face. Her eyes glinted with a hint of triumph.

I could not understand this new change, but Rillard and Henderson and I continued to hold her. Doctor Dale glanced again at his watch. It was almost two. We were all utterly tense.

A window crashed behind us and Virginia screamed exultantly. We spun around — Arthur Newton had crashed through the window and was lunging toward us. His eyes were hell-crimson, his face a white vampire-mask of evil.

With abnormal strength Newton brushed Doctor Dale from his path and grasped Virginia's bound form. Hugh Rillard leapt at him with a snarl but was knocked back by one hand as Newton leapt with the girl toward the window.

But as Newton half-turned to knock back Rillard, I fired at his exposed left breast. Newton stopped dead, his face for an instant agonized and ghastly as my cross-shaped bullet tore into his breast. Then, dropping Virginia, he fell in a limp heap to the floor.

Doctor Dale had staggered up with his pistol out. "Dale, it's Newton!" I cried. "The cross-bullet ended him!"

"He was trying to take Virginia out!"

Dale exclaimed. "You see what it means —Gerritt Geisert, when Virginia did not answer their call, sent Newton in here after her!

"Quick!" he cried. "The sledge and stakes! We'll make sure that Arthur Newton is truly dead, even though the cross-bullet appears to have made him so."

Hurriedly we set one of the sharpened stakes against Newton's breast and drove it down through his heart, Rillard and I wielding the heavy tool, Newton's body unstirring.

Dale and Henderson then swiftly severed Newton's head. Upon his face, though it showed now the appearance of several-weeks' death which formerly it had not showed, was a naturalness and peace I had never seen there. We then wrapped Newton's body in a sheet, and placed it on the sofa. One of Geisert's vampires, at least, was destroyed!

We turned then to Virginia, but stopped appalled. She was not in the room! She had been lying bound by the broken window where Newton had dropped her, but was not there now!

"She's gone!" Dale cried. "Newton must have broken or loosened her bonds when he grasped her, and she's headed out to the hills to answer Gerritt Geisert's call!"

"After her, then!" yelled Rillard. We leapt to the window, I grasping the sack of tools and stakes, and out into the night.

We reached the road, looking westward. A white object visible in the light of the rising moon was fleeing toward the dark hills.

"There she goes!" Dale cried. "We must overtake her!"

We ran at top speed along the road, after Virginia's fleeing white form. The girl seemed to fly through the night, so swift was her progress.

The hills loomed bigger ahead and still she kept well in front of us. Our pistols were in our hands, gleaming in the moonlight, as we followed. The tools in the sack that I carried clanked with each stride.

WE HAD drawn a little closer to Virginia's white form but were panting hard by the time we ran after her in between the first of the frowning black hills. Henderson was sobbing with each breath as he ran, behind the rest of us, and I knew he must be almost winded.

Through the hills after the running girl we sped, and turned after her down the long narrow valley of deserted manors, whose deep cleft now was illuminated by the silver of the lifting moon. In that illumination I could glimpse on the valley's sides the ancient houses Edward Harmon first had pointed out to us—the Van Broot house and Elphin house and Salton house and others.

Virginia was heading toward the ancient Salton house, had left the road and was flitting up through the brush of the valley's steep side toward the rotting old structure. We glimpsed her white figure momentarily in the brush; then it was hidden from us.

"The Salton place!" panted Rillard. "She's heading for the old house—Gerritt Geisert and the others must be there!"

"We'll be up there in a few minutes!" Doctor Dale exclaimed. "Keep your pistols ready!"

We struggled up the slope through the tangled brush and briars, heedless of their tearing fingers. We emerged breathless and bleeding into the moonlit clearing on the slope that held the rotting high-roofed manor-house, just in time to see its door close upon Virginia.

Rillard was throwing himself toward the house, but Dale held him back a moment.

"Wait!" he exclaimed fiercely. "We must be sure that Gerritt Geisert does not escape this time!"

He tore the sack from me, drew swiftly from it the garlic we had put in it that day.

"Each of you take some of these, go around the house and place them outside the doors and windows!" he said. "Quick!"

"But Virginia's in there with those vampire-fiends!" Rillard cried crazily.

"Do as I say!" Doctor Dale said, his eyes blazing. Rillard with a groan grasped some of the withered branches, as the rest of us had done, and we ran silently across the moonlit clearing to the house.

Its decaying doors and window-shutters were closed, but we heard high and wild voices from inside. Swiftly and with thumping hearts we placed the garlic outside the sills of doors and windows.

The sky eastward was paling a little. Dawn was close at hand, I saw, as I joined Doctor Dale and Rillard and Henderson at the front of the house. The voices inside were now passionate, furious. We pressed against the loose-hung rotting door and through the crack between it and its frame we could look into the room inside, bright-lit by the moonlight streaming through innumerable crevices in rotting roof and walls.

Gerritt Geisert stood at the room's center with Virginia Ralton's white-garbed figure in his arms! She lay with eyes closed and without power of resistance in his grasp, her jacket-collar open and exposing the punctures on her throat.

But Geisert was not looking at her. He was confronting, as he held her, the two others in the room, Allene and Olivia Ralton. The two women-vampires, in their white shrouds, were terrible in aspect, their red eyes burning with infernal fury.

"I say you get none!" Geisert was exclaiming to them in high, rasping voice. "It will be sunrise in minutes, you fools! There is no time for you to take her blood—hardly time enough for me!"

"But why should you be the one?" cried Olivia Ralton with unholy passion. "She is my victim as much as yours, and my sister also! Her blood belongs more to me than to you!"

"And more to me than to either of you!" cried Allene Ralton. "She is my child and her blood should be mine!"

"I say no!" thundered Geisert in hellish rage. "Down to your coffins! Sunrise is almost here!"

"We won't!" screeched Allene Ralton. "Who are you to take the victims and the blood that belongs to us!"

She and Olivia darted forward like twin attacking furies at Geisert. Without releasing Virginia, Geisert raised his hand, and though he did not touch either of the two women vampires, they recoiled as from a blow, and shrank to the moonlit room's other side.

"So you find out again I am master!" cried Geisert in diabolical mockery. "And that as master the blood of this girl is——"

"Not yours!" yelled Doctor Dale as we four crashed in through the rotted door. Dale and I fired together at Geisert.

We missed, and Geisert, red fire blazing in his eyes, swung Virginia Ralton's limp white form between himself and us so that we dared not fire. He backed to a door and stairs leading down into the dark cellar, dropped Virginia and sprang into the darkness as Olivia and Allene Ralton, screeching in fury, sprang at us.

DALE and Rillard and I shot at the two women fiends as they leapt but in the wild flurry we missed. Olivia Ralton

bore Rillard down and was seeking his throat with sharp teeth when Dale and I fired together at her. She fell limp as the cross-shaped bullets struck her.

Allene Ralton was upon us as Rillard scrambled up. Before we could turn our pistols upon her Gerritt Geisert burst up again out of the cellar, eyes a red flame, a black coffin of antique design held in his grasp. We had not time to fire before he was across the room, one arm holding the coffin like a feather while with a sweep of the other he knocked Rillard and Henderson and me from his path.

He and Allene Ralton leapt to escape through the open door, but at its threshold they recoiled from the garlic we had placed outside. Dawn was painting the sky grayly and rosy beams eastward showed sunrise was at hand. With an inhuman screech Allene Ralton fled downward into the darkness of the cellar while Gerritt Geisert, his white face awful in its rage, sprang to one of the windows.

But as he tore it open, as he recoiled from the withered branches outside its sill, Dale and Rillard and I shot together. The coffin dropped from Geisert's grasp as our cross-bullets tore into him. He swayed a moment with the raging red hell-fires in his eyes dulling, then fell and lay motionless.

A bright shaft of golden light struck in through the open door from the rising sun.

We staggered, looking wildly at one another. "It's over!" Henderson sobbed. "Oh God, it's over!"

"Dale, what of Allene Ralton?" I cried thickly. "She went down there!"

"She fled down there to her coffin when she saw sunrise coming," Dale said. "She's down there in it now, stiff and helpless—but Virginia——"

Hugh Rillard had dropped beside Virginia's limp form. "Virginia, it's I!" he choked. "It's Hugh!"

She stirred a little, and opened her eyes dazedly. "But I'm all right—what happened——"

"Take her outside, Rillard," said Doctor Dale. "Owen, you and Henderson help me take these bodies down to the cellar."

As Rillard helped the still-dazed girl out we took first Gerritt Geisert's body and then that of Olivia Ralton down the stairs into the dark cellar. Doctor Dale flashed the beam of his flashlight around and the light fell on three coffins. Two of them were open, one closed.

"The coffins of Allene and Olivia Ralton and of Arthur Newton," Dale said. "See——"

He opened the lid of the closed coffin. His beam fell on the face of Allene Ralton, lying stiff and unmoving with closed eyes.

"Bring Geisert's coffin down, too," Dale said, "and the sack of tools."

When we had done so we placed Gerritt Geisert's body in his antique coffin. Soon a terrible odor of long-deferred decomposition arose from Geisert's two-hundred-year-old body as we staked it.

The body was already disintegrating, in fact, and when we had finished driving a stake down through its heart and severing the head, it was not much more than bones and dust. We closed the coffin. Gerritt Geisert, master of the dead-alive, was at long last truly dead.

Olivia Ralton too lay motionless in her coffin as the cruel but merciful stake drove down through her heart and her head was severed, her vampire-life already paralyzed like Geisert's by our cross-bullets. But when we used stake and steel upon Allene Ralton's body her convulsions and writhings were a repetition of those of Alice Wilsey. At the end of

those terrible few minutes Henderson's hands were shaking violently, but as we closed Allene Ralton's coffin her face held the peace of the truly dead.

We left the coffins and bodies in the cellar, awaiting their return to the cemetery where they would now sleep undisturbed, and went back up out of the dark cellar, and out of the house into the bright sunlight. The world was brilliant in that early morning light, even the long dark valley suddenly fair and smiling to our eyes.

Virginia Ralton came toward us with Rillard as we emerged. "Doctor Dale!" she cried. "The marks on my throat have gone completely! See!" And she showed us her unmarred neck.

Dale nodded wearily, a faint smile in his eyes, as Doctor Henderson and I leaned forward to see. "Yes, Virginia," he said, "they passed with the passing of the black vampire-evil that caused them.

"There is nothing more to fear now, for that evil is gone as utterly as though it had never been, as utterly as all evil must go in time, even though for a while it works untold ill."

"Then everything is over?" cried Virginia.

Dale looked past her at Rillard and shook his head. "No," he said. "For you, everything is beginning."

[THE END]

In the Triangle

By HOWARD WANDREI

A brief strange tale about a weird beast, and an old man in gray

HE LISTENED. In the familiar woods surrounding the house was some exotic beast, making its presence known in the most puzzling manner. Arnold closed the book he had been reading and walked over to the open window. The August afternoon was at its pitch, and the heavy, moist, hazy air had suffocated all other living things into silence. The man looked through the woods in the direction of the sound, and then cocked his head, listening intently, trying to identify the sound. It was a broken succession of growlings, a gobbling curiously interrupted so as to sound like a mechanical and humorless chuckling.

He was disturbed. There could be no beast on earth that could make a sound like that. Its utterly mechanical nature seemed all exact repetition. He thought of a phonograph, whose arm soullessly and maddeningly played the same groove of a record over and over and over again. His house was remotely situated, and no one from town would be here on such a stifling afternoon. The empty lightness of children was not in the noise, and it could hardly be made with implements. It was a throaty evidence of life, and now

it cut regularly through the air like a vocal saw.

Arnold knew the woods very well, having lived here many years; the origin of the disturbance would not be difficult to locate. The thing was worth investigating. Having listened at the window with increasing wonder for several minutes, he dropped his book on the window-seat and crossed the room to the door. Here he stopped for a moment, but decided not to lock it. The small animals of the woods might take a bright object or two, so he returned to close the window. Then he closed the door, and after looking up at the dead blue sky and around at his greening acres, made off through the trees. No human being was likely to visit, especially on a day like this. Only one white-haired old man had come by in the last two weeks. Curious old fellow. He had eyed Arnold as though he were taking pictures of his ways, his body, and his brain; and he had taken his own time in leaving.

No air stirred. The birds were silent, and the trees stood so still they seemed waiting for life. Arnold now walked rapidly and softly, peering through the trees ahead and to either side. The ground was not entirely free of brush, nor was it level. But the loose collocations of elms, oaks, and cottonwoods, which were commonest in this country, admitted a fairly unobstructed view for some distance ahead. As he walked he looked familiarly on his property, identifying a stump, touching a tree where he had carved his initials a year or two ago. Now he was ascending a broad, low knoll, the first site he had chosen for his house, and decided against because of the magnificent trees growing here. From the continued noise of the beast he knew that discovery was close at hand. The sound was even more puzzling than before, and it would be difficult to say whether it was caused by throat or machine. There would be enlightenment on the other side of the knoll.

As he walked, the exotic growling assumed the character of a struggle, and now, as he advanced more and more carefully, a thin, plaintive human voice, oddly familiar, augmented the sound of eccentric, senseless chuckling. So it was a struggle, and one of the contenders was a man calling weakly for help.

Arnold quickly crested the knoll, shouting, "Hold on! I'm with you in a moment!"

The struggle, instead of ceasing at his now noisy approach, increased, and the chuckle became magnified to a broken, staccato barking. Arnold shouted again encouragingly, and, breaking through a clinging screen of creepers and clutching brush, stopped dead as he sighted the struggling figures before him.

In this spot three venerable cottonwoods formed an almost perfect triangle, within which the ground was almost free of all growth. In this triangle was lying prone an old man with long white hair. It was the old fellow who had dropped in two weeks ago. He was plainly and neatly dressed in coarse gray cloth, as before, and he was striving fearfully to protect his throat and abdomen from the teeth and disemboweling claws of a strange beast.

The beast was of human size, and seemed to have something of the characteristics each of ape, pig, and dog. Its fangs were of extraordinary length, however, and it made such a violent caricature of life that Arnold looked on it with disgust and horror. Coarse black hair covered the body, and a short tail jerked convulsively as the beast made its barking noises and its arching fangs worried the

old man's throat. A hybrid? Odd animals have appeared most unaccountably at the strangest times in the most unexpected places. There was the dog-boar monstrosity that was found in France. This might not be the worst nor the least of nature's baroque experiments.

COMPLETELY revolted by the appearance of the queer animal, Arnold hastily looked around for a convenient weapon, answering the piteous appeal in the old man's eyes. It he had taken fuller account of the situation he might have hesitated, and thought the struggle even stranger than at first sight.

In the first place, aside from the affair in the triangle, the woods were uncommonly still, so still that the air seemed charged with waiting and expectancy. There was so marked a contrast between the apparent violence in the triangle and the deathly summer stillness of the air and brush and trees that the whole affair was denied both purpose and reality. The background of silence, suggesting a toleration that approached human understanding, gave the struggle the character of highest artificiality.

Arnold missed the significance in the attacking fangs of the beast. The teeth were terribly sharp, and, though repeatedly closing on the old man's throat, never dented the skin. The disemboweling claws, full of raking death, exerted their convulsive weight, and nothing more. The claws themselves scarcely caught in the old man's neat gray cloth. Arnold had heard the ugly, ghoulish barking aright, but didn't see its meaning. The barks were unfinished growlings, animal sounds continually started and never completed. The old man exhibited no evidences of physical harm; his plain garments were unsullied, and were disposed in careful folds. The waiting woods and the struggling forms insidiously represented a composite threat and nothing more.

But Arnold, unable to find either stick or stone in the enclosed triangle, and daring to take no time looking through the brush encroaching on this particular spot, flung himself bodily on the assaulting beast. The impact of his body liberated the old man, who took to his feet at once, and circled the two on the ground gingerly.

"Kill him! Kill him!" he squeaked querulously.

"Get a stick!" said Arnold, furiously struggling. But the old man stood by, watching the two interestedly.

The beast emitted magnified, full-throated barkings now, and a long violence of growlings. Its rank, intolerable animal odor was suffocating and charnel in the stagnant air, and Arnold fought to finish the thing as soon as possible. Oddly enough, he thought at this moment of his pleasant room and the book he had been reading. The time-spread initials he had carved in the tree seemed stamped on the beast's rugose, leonine forehead.

The hateful feeling of the moist, swine-like skin was a difficulty in itself, but more important was the fact that the animal's body afforded no firm grasp. He was holding the creature desperately by its wrists, and his superior position prevented it from using its deadly legs. Neither of them was free to use his hands.

"For God's sake, hit it! Kick its head!" he said, and looked up at the old man, his eyes full of violent entreaty. But the old man only skipped about tensely, eyeing the beast and looking at Arnold nervously. Arnold cursed his luck in hearing the beast from his untroubled house. Better the old man had died. Or would he have died anyhow? The animal might have been the old devil's pet, to all ap-

pearances. At any rate the old fellow didn't seem to have a scratch on his body from the curious encounter.

As Arnold looked into the beast's flaming eyes his brain flushed with desperation, purpose, and horror. The creature's wide, fixed stare seemed an attempt to take possession of his will, and he felt himself drowning in the engulfing shadows of the beast's mindlessness. He shook his head dizzily, freeing himself from the hypnotizing stare, and, as his one resort, sickly forced his jaws to the beast's throat.

He found his face wet and warm, and the taste of blood on his lips. The reek of the thing's skin checked his breath. Convinced now that the situation demanded the beast's life or his own, he worked with distasteful hurry: there was the sanctuary afterward of his room and his books, nor would he ever bury this vileness on his loved property. The old man would hear a word or two, moreover. He had offered no help in the least, only dancing about like a gray-headed, delighted monkey.

During this time the creature had made no effort to use its own powerful jaws, only barking and growling savagely. And at Arnold's sudden determination to take its life, it closed its jaws for his convenience and merely continued the sound through its nose and throat. Its body lurched about with all the appearance of deadly intent, but it made no attempt at definite harm. Arnold had missed this singularity, and now his revolted jaws clipped the beast's jugular.

The mingled incidents of the situation resolved themselves into coincidences. Arnold found himself lying prone, in the position the beast had occupied, looking dimly at the sky. Twigs on the ground racked his naked body roughly. His throat and wrists hurt terribly, and he raised his arms to find his neck mangled, the large veins severed, and his life ebbing away in warm spurts. The arm was bare and swarthy, like pigskin, as was his whole unfamiliar body. The coarse fingers terminated in powerful claws. The leathery, slimy tongue with which he tried to lick his straining lips encountered strange, curving fangs. Above him stood the beast, and his dying brain burned with shame as he recognized his own garments, his own watchful attitude, and himself, looking down eagerly with his own now weirdly glittering eyes.

Now the quiet summer afternoon afforded the scene of a hairy beast lying alone on the ground in the center of triangulated cottonwoods, clawing horribly at its breast. A young man and an old man with long white hair were walking off through the woods to Arnold's house, and, as the strange beast's head rolled sideways, the eyes filming in death glimpsed finally the brisk figure of the old man looking back gleefully.

Candles

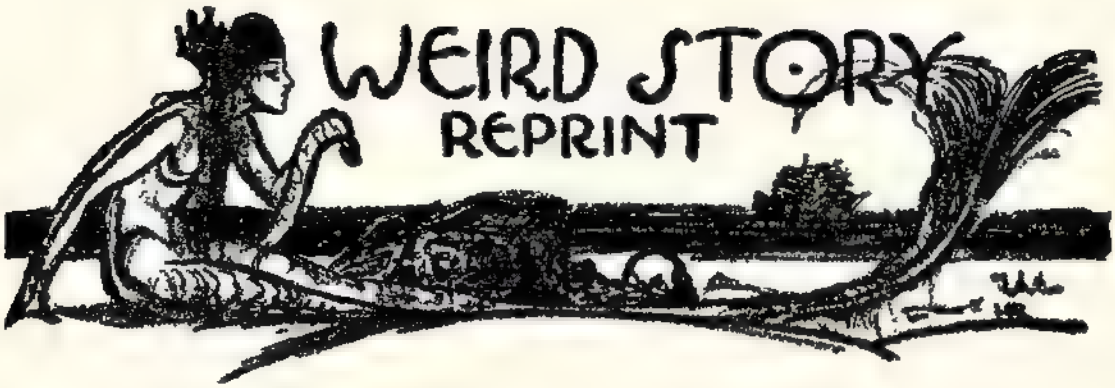
By DOROTHY QUICK

Bring candles red and candles white
To light my lord, the King, tonight:
Candles red for his heart's true worth
Flaming for him, who rules the earth;
Candles white for the soul of him,
And never let their light grow dim;
Candles white and candles red
To guide him to the bridal bed.

Bring candles blue and candles green
To light my lady fair, the Queen:
Candles blue for her trusting eyes
And for the faith that in them lies;
Candles green for the land she brings,
That join her sovereign Lord's, the King's;
Candles blue and candles green
To light the chamber of the Queen.

Candles red, green, white and blue,
All burning with a steady hue.
White her body, red her mouth,
Green her lands, both north and south;
Red the passion of his kiss,
White her yielding unto this;
Blue the panels of her room,
Blue the overhanging doom.

White the moonlight where she lies,
Blue the terror in her eyes;
Red the blood on the King's hands—
Fair and broad were her green lands.
Light candles tall and candles white
To speed the Queen's soul on its flight.
Bring candles tall and candles black
To light the King on his way back.



The Woman of the Wood

By A. MERRITT

McKAY sat on the balcony of the little inn that squatted like a brown gnome among the pines that clothed the eastern shore of the lake.

It was a small and lonely lake high up on the Vosges; and yet the word "lonely" is not just the one to tag its spirit; rather was it aloof, withdrawn. The mountains came down on every side, making a vast tree-lined bowl that seemed filled, when McKay first saw it, with a still wine of peace.

McKay had worn the wings with honor in the World War. And as a bird loves the trees, so did McKay love them. They were to him not merely trunks and roots, branches and leaves; they were personalities. He was acutely aware of character differences even among the same species—that pine was jolly and benevolent; that one austere, monkish; there stood a swaggering bravo and there a sage wrapped in green meditation; that birch was a wanton—the one beside her virginal, still adream.

The war had sapped McKay, nerve, brain and soul. Through all the years that had passed the wound had kept open. But now, as he slid his car down the side of the great green bowl, he felt its peace reach out to him, caress and quiet him, promise him healing. He seemed to drift like a falling leaf through the cathedraled woods; to be cradled by the hands of the trees.

McKay had stopped at the little gnome of an inn, and there he had lingered, day after day, week after week.

The trees had nursed him; soft whisperings of the leaves, slow chant of the needled pines, had first deadened, then driven from him the re-echoing clamor of the war and its sorrow. The open wound of his spirit had closed under their healing, had closed and become scars; and then even the scars had been covered and buried, as the scars on Earth's breast are covered and buried beneath the falling

* From WEIRD TALES for August, 1926.

leaves of autumn. The trees had laid healing hands upon his eyes. He had sucked strength from the green breasts of the hills.

As that strength flowed back to him, McKay grew aware that the place was—troubled; that there was ferment of fear within it.

It was as though the trees had waited until he himself had become whole before they made their own unrest known to him. But now they were trying to tell him something; there was a shrillness as of apprehension, of anger, in the whispering of the leaves, the needled chanting of the pines.

And it was this that had kept McKay at the inn—a definite consciousness of appeal. He strained his ears to catch words in the rustling branches, words that trembled on the brink of his human understanding. Never did they cross that brink.

Gradually he had focused himself, so he believed, to the point of the valley's unease.

On all of the shores of the lake there were but two dwellings. One was the inn, and around the inn the trees clustered protectively, confidingly, friendly. It was as though they had not only accepted it, but had made it part of themselves.

Not so was it of the other habitation. Once it had been the hunting-lodge of long-dead lords; now it was half ruined, forlorn. It lay across the lake almost exactly opposite the inn and back upon the slope a half-mile from the shore. Once there had been fat fields around it and a fair orchard.

The forest had marched down upon fields and lodge. Here and there scattered pines and poplars stood like soldiers guarding some outpost; scouting parties of saplings lurked among the gaunt, broken fruit trees. But the forest had not had its way unchecked; ragged stumps showed where those who dwelt in the old house had cut down the invaders; blackened patches showed where they had fired the woods.

Here was the center of the conflict. Here the green folk of the forest were both menaced and menacing, at war.

The lodge was a fortress beleaguered by the trees, a fortress whose garrison sallied forth with ax and torch to take their toll of their besiegers.

Yet McKay sensed a slow, inexorable pressing on of the forest; he saw it as an army ever filling the gaps in its enclosing ranks, shooting its seeds into the cleared places, sending its roots out to sap them; and armed always with a crushing patience. He had the impression of constant regard, of watchfulness, as though night and day the forest kept myriads of eyes upon the lodge, inexorably, not to be swerved from its purpose. He had spoken of this impression to the innkeeper and his wife, and they had looked at him, oddly.

"Old Polleau does not love the trees, no," the old man had said. "No, nor do his two sons. They do not love the trees—and very certainly the trees do not love them."

BETWEEN the lodge and the shore, marching down to the verge of the lake was a singularly beautiful little coppice of silver birches and firs. This coppice stretched for perhaps a quarter of a mile; it was not more than a hundred feet or two in depth, and not alone the beauty of its trees but also their curious grouping vividly aroused McKay's interest. At each end were a dozen or more of the glistening, needled firs, not clustered but spread out as though in open marching order; at widely spaced inter-

vals along its other two sides paced single firs. The birches, slender and delicate, grew within the guard of these sturdier trees, yet not so thickly as to crowd one another.

To McKay the silver birches were for all the world like some gay caravan of lovely demoiselles under the protection of debonair knights. With that odd other sense of his he saw the birches as delectable damsels, merry and laughing—the pines as lovers, troubadours in green-needled mail. And when the winds blew and the crests of the trees bent under them, it was as though dainty demoiselles picked up fluttering, leafy skirts, bent leafy hoods and danced while the knights of the firs drew closer round them, locked arms and danced with them to the roaring horns of the winds. At such times he almost heard sweet laughter from the birches, shoutings from the firs.

Of all the trees in that place McKay loved best this little wood. He had rowed across and rested in its shade, had dreamed there and, dreaming, had heard mysterious whisperings and the sound of dancing feet light as falling leaves; had taken dream-draft of that gayety which was the soul of the little wood.

Two days ago he had seen Polleau and his two sons. McKay had lain dreaming in the coppice all that afternoon. As dusk began to fall he had reluctantly arisen and begun to row back to the inn. When he had been a few hundred feet from shore three men had come out from the trees and had stood watching him—three grim powerful men taller than the average French peasant.

He had called a friendly greeting to them, but they had not answered it; had stood there, scowling. Then as he bent again to his oars, one of the sons had raised a hatchet and driven it savagely into the trunk of a slim birch. McKay thought he heard a thin, wailing cry from the stricken tree, a sigh from all the little wood.

He had felt as though the keen edge had bitten into his own flesh.

"Stop that!" he had cried. "Stop it, damn you!"

For answer Polleau's son had struck again—and never had McKay seen hate etched so deep as on his face as he struck. Cursing, a killing rage in his heart, McKay had swung the boat around, raced back to shore. He had heard the hatchet strike again and again and, close now to shore, had heard a crackling and over it once more the thin, high wailing. He had turned to look.

The birch was tottering, was falling. Close beside it grew one of the firs, and, as the smaller tree crashed over, it dropped upon this fir like a fainting maid into the arms of her lover. And as it lay and trembled there, one of the branches of the other tree slipped from under it, whipped out and smote the hatchet-wielder a crushing blow upon the head, sending him to earth.

It had been, of course, only the chance blow of a bough, bent by pressure of the fallen trunk and then released as that had slipped down. Of course—yet there had been such suggestion of conscious action in the branch's recoil, so much of bitter anger in it, so much, in truth, had it been like a purposeful blow that McKay felt an eery prickling of his scalp; his heart had missed its beat.

For a moment Polleau and the standing son had stared at the sturdy fir with the silvery birch lying upon its green breast; folded in and shielded by its needled boughs as though — again the swift impression came to McKay — as though it were a wounded maid stretched on breast, in arms, of knightly lover. For a long moment father and son had stared.

Then, still wordless but with that same bitter hatred in both their faces, they had stooped and picked up the other and, with his arms around the neck of each, had borne him limply away.

McKAY, sitting on the balcony of the inn that morning, went over and over that scene, realized more and more clearly the human aspect of fallen birch and clasping fir, and the conscious deliberateness of the latter's blow. During the two days that had elapsed since then, he had felt the unease of the trees increase, their whispering appeal become more urgent.

What were they trying to tell him? What did they want him to do?

Troubled, he stared across the lake, trying to pierce the mists that hung over it and hid the opposite shore. And suddenly it seemed that he heard the coppice calling him, felt it pull the point of his attention toward it irresistibly, as the lodestone swings and holds the compass needle.

The coppice called him; it bade him come.

McKay obeyed the command; he arose and walked down to the boat landing; he stepped into his skiff and began to row across the lake. As his oars touched the water his trouble fell from him. In its place flowed peace and a curious exaltation.

The mists were thick upon the lake. There was no breath of wind, yet the mists billowed and drifted, shook and curtained under the touch of unfelt airy hands.

They were alive — the mists; they formed themselves into fantastic palaces past whose opalescent façades he flew; they built themselves into hills and valleys and circled plains whose floors were rippling silk. Tiny rainbows gleamed out among them, and upon the water prismatic patches shone and spread like spilled wine of opals. He had the illusion of vast distances—the hillocks of mist were real mountains, the valleys between them were not illusory. He was a colossus cleaving through some elfin world. A trout broke, and it was like Leviathan leaping from the fathomless deep. Around the arc of the fish's body rainbows interlaced and then dissolved into rain of softly gleaming gems—diamonds in dance with sapphires, flame-hearted rubies, pearls with shimmering souls of rose. The fish vanished, diving cleanly without sound; the jeweled bows vanished with it; a tiny irised whirlpool swirled for an instant where trout and flashing arcs had been.

Nowhere was there sound. He let his oars drop and leaned forward, drifting. In the silence, before him and around him, he felt opening the gateways of an unknown world.

And suddenly he heard the sound of voices, many voices, faint at first and murmurous. Louder they became, swiftly; women's voices sweet and lilting, and mingled with them the deeper tones of men; voices that lifted and fell in a wild, gay chanting through whose *joyesse* ran undertones both of sorrow and of anger —as though faery weavers threaded through silk spun of sunbeams, somber strands dipped in the black of graves, and crimson strands stained in the red of wrathful sunsets.

He drifted on, scarce daring to breathe lest even that faint sound break the elfin song. Closer it rang and clearer, and now he became aware that the speed of his boat was increasing, that it was no longer drifting; as though the little waves on each side were pushing him ahead with soft and noiseless palms. His boat grounded, and as its keel rustled along

over the smooth pebbles of the beach the song ceased.

McKay half arose and peered before him. The mists were thicker here, but he could see the outlines of the coppice. It was like looking at it through many curtains of fine gauze, and its trees seemed shifting, ethereal, unreal. And moving among the trees were figures that threaded among the boles and flitted round them in rhythmic measures, like the shadows of leafy boughs swaying to some cadenced wind.

He stepped ashore. The mists dropped behind him, shutting off all sight of the lake; and as they dropped, McKay lost all sense of strangeness, all feeling of having entered some unfamiliar world. Rather was it as though he had returned to one he had once known well and that had been long lost to him.

The rhythmic flitting had ceased; there was now no movement as there was no sound among the trees—yet he felt the little wood full of watchful life. McKay tried to speak; there was a spell of silence on his mouth.

"You called me. I have come to listen to you—to help you if I can."

The words formed within his mind, but utter them he could not. Over and over he tried, desperately; the words seemed to die on his lips.

A pillar of mist whirled forward and halted, eddying half an arm-length away. Suddenly out of it peered a woman's face, eyes level with his own. A woman's face—yes; but McKay, staring into those strange eyes probing his, knew that, woman's though it seemed, it was that of no woman of human breed. They were without pupils, the irises deer-large and of the soft green of deep forest dells; within them sparkled tiny star-points of light like motes in a moonbeam. The eyes were wide and set far apart beneath a broad, low brow over which was piled braid upon braid of hair of palest gold, braids that seemed spun of shining ashes of gold. The nose was small and straight, the mouth scarlet and exquisite. The face was oval, tapering to a delicately pointed chin.

Beautiful was that face, but its beauty was an alien one, unearthly. For long moments the strange eyes thrust their gaze deep into his. Then out of the mist were thrust two slender white arms, the hands long, the fingers tapering.

The tapering fingers touched his ears.

"He shall hear," whispered the red lips.

Immediately from all about him a cry arose; in it were the whispering and rustling of the leaves beneath the breath of the winds; the shrilling of the harpstrings of the boughs; the laughter of hidden brooks; the shoutings of waters flinging themselves down into deep and rocky pools—the voices of the forest made articulate.

"He shall hear!" they cried.

The long white fingers rested on his lips, and their touch was cool as bark of birch on cheek after some long upward climb through forest; cool and subtly sweet.

"He shall speak," whispered the scarlet lips of the wood woman.

"He shall speak!" answered the wood voices again, as though in litany.

"He shall see," whispered the woman, and the cold fingers touched his eyes.

"He shall see!" echoed the wood voices.

THE mists that had hidden the coppice from McKay wavered, thinned and were gone. In their place was a limpid, translucent, palely green *æther*, faintly luminous—as though he stood within some clear wan emerald. His feet pressed a golden moss spangled with tiny starry

bluets. Fully revealed before him was the woman of the strange eyes and the face of unearthly beauty. He dwelt for a moment upon the slender shoulders, the firm, small, tip-tilted breasts, the willow litheness of her body. From neck to knees a smock covered her, sheer and silken and delicate as spun cobwebs; through it her body gleamed as though fire of the young spring moon ran in her veins.

He looked beyond her. There upon the golden moss were other women like her, many of them; they stared at him with the same wide-set green eyes in which danced the sparkling moonbeam motes; like her they were crowned with glistening, pallidly golden hair; like hers, too, were their oval faces with the pointed chins and perilous alien beauty. Only where she stared at him gravely, measuring him, weighing him—there were those of her sisters whose eyes were mocking; and those whose eyes called to him with a weirdly tingling allure, their mouths athirst; those whose eyes looked upon him with curiosity alone; those whose great eyes pleaded with him, prayed to him.

Within that pellucid, greenly luminous *æther* McKay was abruptly aware that the trees of the coppice still had a place. Only now they were spectral indeed. They were like white shadows cast athwart a glaucous screen; trunk and bough, twig and leaf they arose around him and they were as though etched in air by phantom craftsmen—thin and unsubstantial; they were ghost trees rooted in another space.

He was aware that there were men among the women; men whose eyes were set wide apart as were theirs, as strange and pupilless as were theirs, but with irises of brown and blue; men with pointed chins and oval faces, broad-shouldered and clad in kirtles of darkest green; swarthy-skinned men, muscular and strong, with that same lithe grace of the women—and like them of a beauty that was alien and elfin.

McKay heard a little wailing cry. He turned. Close beside him lay a girl clasped in the arms of one of the swarthy, green-clad men. She lay upon his breast. His eyes were filled with a black flame of wrath, and hers were misted, anguished. For an instant McKay had a glimpse of the birch that old Polleau's son had sent crashing down into the boughs of the fir. He saw birch and fir as immaterial outlines around this man and this girl. For an instant girl and man and birch and fir seemed to be one and the same.

The scarlet-lipped woman touched his shoulder.

"She withers," sighed the woman, and in her voice McKay heard a faint rustling as of mournful leaves. "Now is it not pitiful that she withers—our sister who was so young, so slender and so lovely?"

McKay looked again at the girl. The white skin seemed shrunken; the moon radiance that gleamed through the bodies of the others was still in hers, but dim and pallid; her slim arms hung listlessly; her body drooped. Her mouth was wan and parched, her long and misted green eyes dull. The palely golden hair was lusterless and dry. He looked on a slow death—a withering death.

"May the arm that struck her down wither!" said the green-clad man who held her, and in his voice McKay heard a savage strumming as of winter winds through bleak boughs: "May his heart wither and the sun blast him! May the rain and the waters deny him and the winds scourge him!"

"I thirst," whispered the girl.

There was a stirring among the watching women. One came forward holding a chalice that was like thin leaves turned

to green crystal. She paused beside the trunk of one of the spectral trees, reached up and drew down to her a branch. A slim girl with half-frightened, half-resentful eyes glided to her side and threw her arms around the ghostly bole. The woman cut the branch deep with what seemed an arrow-shaped flake of jade and held her chalice under it. From the cut a faintly opalescent liquid dripped into the cup. When it was filled, the woman beside McKay stepped forward and pressed her own long hands around the bleeding branch. She stepped away and McKay saw that the stream had ceased to flow. She touched the trembling girl and unclasped her arms.

"It is healed," said the woman gently. "And it was your turn, little sister. The wound is healed. Soon you will have forgotten."

The woman with the chalice knelt and set it to the wan, dry lips of her who was —withering. She drank of it, thirstily, to the last drop. The misty eyes cleared, they sparkled; the lips that had been so parched and pale grew red, the white body gleamed as though the waning light within it had been fed with new.

"Sing, sisters," the girl cried, shrilly. "Dance for me, sisters!"

Again burst out that chant McKay had heard as he had floated through the mists upon the lake. Now, as then, despite his open ears, he could distinguish no words, but clearly he understood its mingled themes—the joy of spring's awakening, rebirth, with green life streaming singing up through every bough, swelling the buds, burgeoning with tender leaves the branches; the dance of the trees in the scented winds of spring; the drums of the jubilant rain on leafy hoods; passion of summer sun pouring its golden flood down upon the trees; the moon passing with stately steps and slow, and green hands reaching up to her and drawing from her breast milk of silver fire; riot of wild gay winds with their mad pipings and strummings; soft interlacing of boughs; the kiss of amorous leaves—all these and more, much more that McKay could not understand since they dealt with hidden, secret things for which man has no images, were in that chanting.

And all these and more were in the rhythms of the dancing of those strange, green-eyed women and brown-skinned men; something incredibly ancient, yet young as the speeding moment; something of a world before and beyond man.

McKay listened; he watched, lost in wonder, his own world more than half forgotten.

The woman beside him touched his arm. She pointed to the girl.

"Yet she withers," she said. "And not all our life, if we poured it through her lips, could save her."

He saw that the red was draining slowly from the girl's lips, that the luminous life-tides were waning. The eyes that had been so bright were misting and growing dull once more. Suddenly a great pity and a great rage shook him. He knelt beside her, took her hands in his.

"Take them away! Take away your hands! They burn me!" she moaned.

"He tries to help you," whispered the green-clad man, gently. But he reached over and drew McKay's hands away.

"Not so can you help her or us," said the woman.

"What can I do?" McKay arose, looked helplessly from one to the other. "What can I do to help you?"

The chanting died, the dance stopped. A silence fell, and he felt upon him the eyes of all these strange people. They were tense, waiting. The woman took his hands. Their touch was cool and sent

a strange sweetness sweeping through his veins.

"There are three men yonder," she said. "They hate us. Soon we shall all be as she is there—withering! They have sworn it, and as they have sworn so will they do. Unless——"

She paused. The moonbeam dancing motes in her eyes changed to tiny sparklings of red that terrified him.

"Three men?" In his clouded mind was dim memory of Polleau and his two strong sons. "Three men?" he repeated, stupidly. "But what are three men to you who are so many? What could three men do against those stalwart gallants of yours?"

"No," she shook her head. "No—there is nothing our—men—can do; nothing that we can do. Once, night and day, we were gay. Now we fear—night and day. They mean to destroy us. Our kin have warned us. And our kin can not help us. Those three are masters of blade and flame. Against blade and flame we are helpless."

"Surely will they destroy us," murmured the woman. "We shall wither—all of us. Like her there, or burn—unless——"

Suddenly she threw white arms around McKay's neck. She pressed her body close to him. Her scarlet mouth sought and found his lips and clung to them. Through all McKay's body ran swift, sweet flames, green fire of desire. His own arms went round her, crushed her to him.

"You shall not die!" he cried. "No—by God, you shall not!"

She drew back her head, looked deep into his eyes.

"They have sworn to destroy us," she said, "and soon. With blade and flame they will destroy us—those three—unless——"

"Unless?" he asked, fiercely.

"Unless you — slay them first!" she answered.

A cold shock ran through McKay, chilling the fires of his desire. He dropped his arm from around the woman, thrust her from him. For an instant she trembled before him.

"Slay!" he heard her whisper—and she was gone.

THE spectral trees wavered; their outlines thickened out of immateriality into substance. The green translucence darkened. He had a swift vertiginous moment as though he swung between two worlds. He closed his eyes. The dizziness passed and he opened them, looked around him.

He stood on the lakeward skirts of the little coppice. There were no shadows flitting, no sign of white woman nor of swarthy, green-clad men. His feet were on green moss. Gone was the soft golden carpet with its bluets. Birches and firs clustered solidly before him.

At his left was a sturdy fir in whose needled arms a broken birch tree lay withering. It was the birch that Polleau's son had so wantonly slashed down. For an instant he saw within the fir and birch the immaterial outlines of the green-clad man and the slim girl who withered. For that instant birch and fir and girl and man seemed one and the same. He stepped back, and his hands touched the smooth, cool bark of another birch that rose close at his right.

Upon his hands the touch of that bark was like—was like what? Curiously was it like the touch of the long slim hands of the woman of the scarlet lips!

McKay stood there, staring, wondering, like a man who has but half awakened from dream. And suddenly a little wind stirred the leaves of the rounded birch

beside him. The leaves murmured, sighed. The wind grew stronger and the leaves whispered.

"Slay!" he heard them whisper—and again: "Slay! Help us! Slay!"

And the whisper was the voice of the woman of the scarlet lips!

Rage, swift and unreasoning, sprang up in McKay. He began to run up through the coppice, up to where he knew was the old lodge in which dwelt Polleau and his sons. And as he ran the wind blew stronger about him, and louder and louder grew the whispering of the trees.

"Slay!" they whispered. "Slay them! Save us! Slay!"

"I will slay! I will save you!" McKay, panting, hammer pulse beating in his ears, heard himself answering that ever more insistent command. And in his mind was but one desire—to clutch the throats of Polleau and his sons, to crack their necks; to stand by them then and watch them wither—wither like that slim girl in the arms of the green-clad man.

He came to the edge of the coppice and burst from it out into a flood of sunshine. For a hundred feet he ran, and then he was aware that the whispering command was stilled; that he heard no more that maddening rustling of wrathful leaves. A spell seemed to have been loosed from him; it was as though he had broken through some web of sorcery. McKay stopped, dropped upon the ground, buried his face in the grasses.

He lay there marshaling his thoughts into some order of sanity. What had he been about to do? To rush upon those three men who lived in the old lodge and —slay them! And for what? Because that unearthly, scarlet-lipped woman whose kisses he still could feel upon his mouth had bade him! Because the whispering trees of the little wood had maddened him with that same command! For this he had been about to kill three men!

What were that woman and her sisters and the green-clad swarthy gallants of theirs? Illusions of some waking dream —phantoms born of the hypnosis of the swirling mists through which he had rowed and floated across the lake? Such things were not uncommon. McKay knew of those who by watching the shifting clouds could create and dwell for a time with wide-open eyes within some similar land of fantasy; knew others who needed but to stare at smoothly falling water to set themselves within a world of waking dreams; there were those who could summon dreams by gazing into a ball of crystal, others who found dream-life in saucers of shining ink.

Might not the moving mists have laid those same fingers of hypnosis upon his own mind?—and his love for the trees, the sense of appeal that he had felt so long, his memory of the wanton slaughter of the slim birch have all combined to paint upon his drugged consciousness the fantasms he had beheld?

McKay arose to his feet, shakily enough. He looked back at the coppice. There was no wind now; the leaves were silent, motionless. Reason with himself as he might, something deep within him stubbornly asserted the reality of his experience. At any rate, he told himself, the little wood was far too beautiful to be despoiled.

THE old lodge was about a quarter of a mile away. A path led up to it through the ragged fields. McKay walked up the path, climbed rickety steps and paused, listening. He heard voices and knocked. The door was flung open and old Polleau stood there, peering at him through half-shut, suspicious eyes. One

of the sons stood close behind him. They stared at McKay with grim, hostile faces.

He thought he heard a faint, far-off despairing whisper from the distant wood. And it was as though the pair in the doorway heard it too, for their gaze shifted from him to the coppice, and he saw hatred flicker swiftly across their grim faces. Their gaze swept back to him.

"What do you want?" demanded Polleau, curtly.

"I am a neighbor of yours, stopping at the inn——" began McKay, courteously.

"I know who you are," Polleau interrupted, bruskly, "but what is it that you want?"

"I find the air of this place good for me." McKay stifled a rising anger. "I am thinking of staying for a year or more until my health is fully recovered. I would like to buy some of your land and build me a lodge upon it."

"Yes, *M'sieu?*" There was acid politeness now in the old man's voice. "But is it permitted to ask why you do not remain at the inn? Its fare is excellent and you are well-liked there."

"I have desire to be alone," replied McKay. "I do not like people too close to me. I would have my own land, and sleep under my own roof."

"But why come to me?" asked Polleau. "There are many places upon the far side of the lake that you could secure. It is happy there, and this side is not happy, *M'sieu*. But tell me, what part of my land is it that you desire?"

"That little wood yonder," answered McKay, and pointed to the coppice.

"Ah! I thought so!" whispered Polleau, and between him and his son passed a look of somber understanding.

"That wood is not for sale, *M'sieu,*" he said.

"I can afford to pay well for what I want," said McKay. "Name your price."

"It is not for sale," repeated Polleau, stolidly, "at any price."

"Oh, come," urged McKay, although his heart sank at the finality in that answer. "You have many acres and what is it but a few trees? I can afford to gratify my fancies. I will give you all the worth of your other land for it."

"You have asked what that place that you so desire is, and you have answered that it is but a few trees," said Polleau, slowly, and the tall son behind him laughed, abruptly, maliciously. "But it is more than that, *M'sieu*—oh, much more than that. And you know it, else why should you pay such a price as you offer? Yes, you know it—since you know also that we are ready to destroy it, and you would save it. And who told you all that, *M'sieu?*" he snarled.

There was such malignance, such black hatred in the face thrust suddenly close to McKay's; eyes blazing, teeth bared by uplifted lip, that involuntarily he recoiled.

"Only a few trees!" snarled old Polleau. "Then who told him what we mean to do—eh, Pierre?"

Again the son laughed. And at that laughter McKay felt within him resurgence of his own blind hatred as he had fled through the whispering wood. He mastered himself, turned away; there was nothing he could do — now. Polleau halted him.

"M'sieu," he said, "enter. There is something I would tell you; something, too, I would show you."

He stood aside, bowing with a rough courtesy. McKay walked through the doorway. Polleau with his son followed him. He entered a large, dim room whose ceiling was spanned with smoke-blackened beams. From these beams hung onion strings and herbs and smoke-cured meats. On one side was a wide

fireplace. Huddled beside it sat Polleau's other son. He glanced up as they entered, and McKay saw that a bandage covered one side of his head, hiding his left eye. McKay recognized him as the one who had cut down the slim birch. The blow of the fir, he reflected with a certain satisfaction, had been no futile one.

Old Polleau strode over to that son.

"Look, *M'sieu,*" he said, and lifted the bandage.

McKay saw, with a tremor of horror, a gaping blackened socket, red-rimmed and eyeless.

"Good God, Polleau!" he cried. "But this man needs medical attention. I know something of wounds. Let me go across the lake and bring back my kit. I will attend him."

Old Polleau shook his head, although his grim face for the first time softened. He drew the bandages back in place.

"It heals," he said. "We have some skill in such things. You saw what did it. You watched from your boat as the cursed tree struck him. The eye was crushed and lay upon his cheek. I cut it away. Now he heals. We do not need your aid, *M'sieu.*"

"Yet he ought not have cut the birch," muttered McKay, more to himself than to be heard.

"Why not?" asked old Polleau, fiercely, "since it hated him."

McKay stared at him. What did this old peasant know? The words strengthened his stubborn conviction that what he had seen and heard in the coppice had been actuality — no dream. And still more did Polleau's next words strengthen that conviction.

"M'sieu," he said, "you come here as ambassador—of a sort. The wood has spoken to you. Well, as ambassador I shall speak to you. Four centuries my people have lived in this place. A century we have owned this land. *M'sieu,* in all those years there has been no moment that the trees have not hated us—nor we the trees.

"For all those hundred years there have been hatred and battle between us and the forest. My father, *M'sieu,* was crushed by a tree, my elder brother crippled by another. My father's father, woodsman that he was, was lost in the forest; he came back to us with mind gone, raving of wood-women who had bewitched and mocked him, lured him into swamp and fen and tangled thicket, tormenting him. In every generation the trees have taken their toll of us—women as well as men—maiming or killing us."

"Accidents," interrupted McKay. "This is childish, Polleau. You can not blame the trees."

"In your heart you do not believe so," said Polleau. "Listen, the feud is an ancient one. Centuries ago it began when we were serfs, slaves of the nobles. To cook, to keep us warm in winter, they let us pick up the fagots, the dead branches and twigs that dropped from the trees. But if we cut down a tree to keep us warm, to keep our women and our children warm, yes, if we but tore down a branch—they hanged us, or threw us into dungeons to rot, or whipped us till our backs were red lattices.

"They had their broad fields, the nobles—but we must raise our food in the patches where the trees disdained to grow. And if they did thrust themselves into our poor patches, then, *M'sieu,* we must let them have their way — or be flogged, or be thrown into the dungeons, or be hanged.

"They pressed us in—the trees," the old man's voice grew sharp with fanatic hatred. "They stole our fields and they took the food from the mouths of our

children; they dropped their fagots to us like dole to beggars; they tempted us to warmth when the cold struck to our bones—and they bore us as fruit aswing at the end of the foresters' ropes if we yielded to their tempting.

"Yes, *M'sieu*—we died of cold that they might live! Our children died of hunger that their young might find root-space! They despised us—the trees! We died that they might live—and we were men!

"Then, *M'sieu,* came the Revolution and the freedom. Ah, *M'sieu,* then we took our toll! Great logs roaring in the winter cold—no more huddling over the alms of fagots. Fields where the trees had been—no more starving of our children that theirs might live. Now the trees were the slaves and we the masters.

"And the trees knew, and they hated us!

"But blow for blow, a hundred of their lives for each life of ours—we have returned their hatred. With ax and torch we have fought them——

"The trees!" shrieked Polleau suddenly, eyes blazing red rage, face writhing, foam at the corners of his mouth and gray hair clutched in rigid hands. "The cursed trees! Armies of the trees creeping — creeping — closer, ever closer — crushing us in! Stealing our fields as they did of old! Building their dungeon round us as they built of old the dungeons of stone! Creeping — creeping! Armies of trees! Legions of trees! The trees! The cursed trees!"

McKay listened, appalled. Here was crimson heart of hate. Madness! But what was at the root of it? Some deep inherited instinct, coming down from forefathers who had hated the forest as the symbol of their masters—forefathers whose tides of hatred had overflowed to the green life on which the nobles had laid their taboo, as one neglected child will hate the favorite on whom love and gifts are lavished? In such warped minds the crushing fall of a tree, the maiming sweep of a branch, might appear as deliberate; the natural growth of the forest seem the implacable advance of an enemy.

And yet—the blow of the fir as the cut birch fell *had* been deliberate! And there had been those women of the wood——

"Patience," the standing son touched the old man's shoulder. "Patience! Soon we strike our blow."

Some of the frenzy died out of Polleau's face.

"Though we cut down a hundred," he whispered, "by the hundred they return! But one of us, when they strike—he does not return, no! They have numbers and they have—time. We are now but three, and we have little time. They watch us as we go through the forest, alert to trip, to strike, to crush!

"But, *M'sieu,*" he turned bloodshot eyes to McKay, "we strike our blow, even as Pierre has said. We strike at that coppice that you so desire. We strike there because it is the very heart of the forest. There the secret life of the forest runs at full tide. We know — and you know! Something that, destroyed, will take the heart out of the forest — will make it know us for its masters."

"The women!" The standing son's eyes glittered, malignantly. "I have seen the women there! The fair women with the shining skins who invite—and mock and vanish before hands can seize them."

"The fair women who peer into our windows in the night — and mock us!" muttered the eyeless son.

"They shall mock no more!" shouted old Polleau. "Soon they shall lie, dying! All of them—all of them! They die!"

He caught McKay by the shoulders and shook him like a child.

"Go tell them that!" he shouted. "Say to them that this very day we destroy them. Say to them it is *we* who will laugh when winter comes and we watch their bodies blaze in this hearth of ours and warm us! Go—tell them that!"

He spun McKay around, pushed him to the door, opened it and flung him staggering down the steps. He heard the tall son laugh, the door close. Blind with rage he rushed up the steps and hurled himself against the door. Again the tall son laughed. McKay beat at the door with clenched fists, cursing. The three within paid no heed. Despair began to dull his rage. Could the trees help him —counsel him? He turned and walked slowly down the field path to the little wood.

SLOWLY and ever more slowly he went as he neared it. He had failed. He was a messenger bearing a warrant of death. The birches were motionless, their leaves hung listlessly. It was as though they knew he had failed. He paused at the edge of the coppice. He looked at his watch, noted with faint surprize that already it was high noon. Short shrift enough had the little wood. The work of destruction would not be long delayed.

McKay squared his shoulders and passed in between the trees. It was strangely silent in the coppice. And it was mournful. He had a sense of life brooding around him, withdrawn into itself, sorrowing. He passed through the silent, mournful wood until he reached the spot where the rounded, gleaming-barked tree stood close to the fir that held the withering birch. Still there was no sound, no movement. He laid his hands upon the cool bark of the rounded tree.

"Let me see again!" he whispered. "Let me hear! Speak to me!"

There was no answer. Again and again he called. The coppice was silent. He wandered through it, whispering, calling. The slim birches stood, passive, with limbs and leaves adroop like listless arms and hands of captive maids awaiting in dull wo the will of conquerors. The firs seemed to crouch like hopeless men with heads in hands. His heart ached to the wo that filled the little wood, this hopeless submission of the trees.

When, he wondered, would Polleau strike? He looked at his watch again: an hour had gone by. How long would Polleau wait? He dropped to the moss, against a smooth bole.

And suddenly it seemed to McKay that he was a madman—as mad as Polleau and his sons. Calmly, he went over the old peasant's indictment of the forest, recalled the face and eyes filled with fanatic hate. They were all mad. After all, the trees were—only trees. Polleau and his sons—so he reasoned—had transferred to them the bitter hatred their forefathers had felt for those old lords who had enslaved them; had laid upon them too all the bitterness of their own struggle to exist in this high forest land. When they struck at the trees, it was the ghosts of those forefathers striking at the nobles who had oppressed them; it was themselves striking against their own destiny. The trees were but symbols. It was the warped minds of Polleau and his sons that clothed them in false semblance of conscious life, blindly striving to wreak vengeance against the ancient masters and the destiny that had made their lives one hard and unceasing battle against nature. The nobles were long dead, for destiny can be brought to grips by no man. But the trees were here and alive. Clothed in mirage, through them the driving lust for vengeance could be sated. So much for Polleau and his sons.

And he, McKay: was it not his own

deep love and sympathy for the trees that similarly had clothed them in that false semblance of conscious life? Had he not built his own mirage? The trees did not really mourn, could not suffer, could not —know. It was his own sorrow that he had transferred to them; only his sorrow, that he felt echoing back to him from them. The trees were—only trees.

Instantly, upon the heels of that thought, as though it were an answer, he was aware that the trunk against which he leaned was trembling; that the whole coppice was trembling; that all the little leaves were shaking, tremulously.

McKay, bewildered, leaped to his feet. Reason told him that it was the wind—yet there was no wind!

And as he stood there, a sighing arose as though a mournful breeze were blowing through the trees—and again there was no wind!

Louder grew the sighing and within it now faint wailings.

"They come! They come! Farewell, sisters! Sisters—farewell!"

Clearly he heard the mournful whispers.

McKAY began to run through the trees to the trail that led out to the fields of the old lodge. And as he ran the wood darkened as though clear shadows gathered in it, as though vast unseen wings hovered over it. The trembling of the coppice increased; bough touched bough, clung to each other; and louder became the sorrowful crying: "Farewell, sister! Sister—farewell!"

McKay burst out into the open. Halfway between him and the lodge were Polleau and his sons. They saw him; they pointed and lifted mockingly to him their bright axes. He crouched, waiting for them to come close, all fine-spun theories gone, and rising within him that same rage which hours before had sent him out to slay.

So crouching, he heard from the forested hills a roaring clamor. From every quarter it came, wrathful, menacing; like the voices of legions of great trees bellowing through the horns of tempest. The clamor maddened McKay; fanned the flame of rage to white heat.

If the three men heard it, they gave no sign. They came on steadily, jeering at him, waving their blades. He ran to meet them.

"Go back!" he shouted. "Go back, Polleau! I warn you!"

"He warns us!" jeered Polleau. "He —Pierre, Jean—he warns us!"

The old peasant's arm shot out and his hand caught McKay's shoulder with a grip that pinched to the bone. The arm flexed and hurled him against the unmaimed son. The son caught him, twisted him about and whirled him headlong a dozen yards, crashing through the brush at the skirt of the wood.

McKay sprang to his feet howling like a wolf. The clamor of the forest had grown stronger.

"Kill!" it roared. "Kill!"

The unmaimed son had raised his ax. He brought it down upon the trunk of a birch, half splitting it with one blow. McKay heard a wail go up from the little wood. Before the ax could be withdrawn he had crashed a fist in the ax-wielder's face. The head of Polleau's son rocked back; he yelped, and before McKay could strike again had wrapped strong arms around him, crushing breath from him. McKay relaxed, went limp, and the son loosened his grip. Instantly McKay slipped out of it and struck again, springing aside to avoid the rib-breaking clasp. Polleau's son was quicker than he, the long arm caught him. But as the arms tightened there was the sound of

sharp splintering and the birch into which the ax had bitten toppled. It struck the ground directly behind the wrestling men. Its branches seemed to reach out and clutch at the feet of Polleau's son.

He tripped and fell backward, McKay upon him. The shock of the fall broke his grip and again McKay writhed free. Again he was upon his feet, and again Polleau's strong son, quick as he, faced him. Twice McKay's blows found their mark beneath his heart before once more the long arms trapped him. But the grip was weaker; McKay felt that now their strength was equal.

Round and round they rocked, McKay straining to break away. They fell, and over they rolled and over, arms and legs locked, each striving to free a hand to grip the other's throat. Around them ran Polleau and the one-eyed son, shouting encouragement to Pierre, yet neither daring to strike at McKay lest the blow miss and be taken by the other.

And all that time McKay heard the little wood shouting. Gone from it now was all mournfulness, all passive resignation. The wood was alive and raging. He saw the trees shake and bend as though torn by a tempest. Dimly he realized that the others could hear none of this, see none of it; as dimly wondered why this should be.

"Kill!" shouted the coppice—and ever over its tumult he was aware of the roar of the great forest. "Kill! Kill!"

He saw two shadowy shapes—shadowy shapes of swarthy green-clad men, that pressed close to him as he rolled and fought.

"Kill!" they whispered. "Let his blood flow! Kill!"

He tore a wrist free. Instantly he felt within his hand the hilt of a knife.

"Kill!" whispered the shadowy men.

"Kill!" shrieked the coppice.

"Kill!" roared the forest.

McKay's arm swept up and plunged the knife into the throat of Polleau's son! He heard a choking sob; heard Polleau shriek; felt the hot blood spurt in face and over hand; smelt its salt and faintly acrid odor. The encircling arms dropped from him; he reeled to his feet.

As though the blood had been a bridge, the shadowy men leaped into materiality. One threw himself upon the man McKay had stabbed; the other hurled upon old Polleau. The maimed son turned and fled, howling with terror. A white woman sprang out from the shadow, threw herself at his feet, clutched them and brought him down. Another woman and another dropped upon him. The note of his shrieking changed from fear to agony, then died abruptly into silence.

And now McKay could see none of the trees, neither old Polleau nor his sons, for green-clad men and white women covered them!

He stood stupidly, staring at his red hands. The roar of the forest had changed to a deep triumphal chanting. The coppice was mad with joy. The trees had become thin phantoms etched in emerald translucent air as they had been when first the green sorcery had meshed him. And all around him wove and danced the slim, gleaming women of the wood.

They ringed him, their song bird-sweet and shrill, jubilant. Beyond them he saw gliding toward him the woman of the misty pillar whose kisses had poured the sweet green fire into his veins. Her arms were outstretched to him, her strange wide eyes were rapt on his, her white body gleamed with the moon radiance, her red lips were parted and smiling, a scarlet chalice filled with the promise of undreamed ecstasies. The dancing circle, chanting, broke to let her through.

Abruptly, a horror filled McKay—not of this fair woman, not of her jubilant sister, but of himself.

He had killed! And the wound the war had left in his soul, the wound he thought had healed, had opened.

He rushed through the broken circle, thrust the shining woman aside with his blood-stained hands and ran, weeping, toward the lake shore. The singing ceased. He heard little cries, tender, appealing little cries of pity, soft voices calling on him to stop, to return. Behind him was the sound of little racing feet, light as the fall of leaves upon the moss.

McKay ran on. The coppice lightened, the beach was before him. He heard the fair woman call him, felt the touch of her hand upon his shoulder. He did not heed her. He ran across the narrow strip of beach, thrust his boat out into the water and wading through the shallows threw himself into it.

He lay there for a moment, sobbing, then drew himself up and caught at the oars. He looked back at the shore now a score of feet away. At the edge of the coppice stood the woman, staring at him with pitying, wise eyes. Behind her clustered the white faces of her sisters, the swarthy faces of the green-clad men.

"Come back!" the woman whispered, and held out to him slender arms.

McKay hesitated, his horror lessening in that clear, wise gaze. He half swung the boat around. But his eyes fell again upon his blood-stained hands and again the hysteria gripped him. One thought only was in his mind now—to get far away from where Polleau's son lay with his throat ripped open, to put the lake between him and that haunted shore. He dipped his oars deep, flung the boat forward. Once more the woman called to him and once again. He paid no heed. She threw out her arms in a gesture of passionate farewell. Then a mist dropped like a swift curtain between him and her and all the folk of the little wood.

McKay rowed on, desperately. After a while he shipped oars, and leaning over the boat's side he washed away the red on his hands and arms. His coat was torn and blood-stained; his shirt too. The latter he took off, wrapped it around the stone that was the boat's rude anchor and dropped it into the depths. His coat he dipped into the water, rubbing at the accusing marks. When he had lightened them all he could, he took up his oars.

His panic had gone from him. Upon its ebb came a rising tide of regret; clear before his eyes arose the vision of the shining woman, beckoning him, calling him . . . he swung the boat around to return. And instantly as he did so the mists between him and the farther shore thickened; around him they lightened as though they had withdrawn to make of themselves a barrier to him, and something deep within him whispered that it was too late.

He saw that he was close to the landing of the little inn. There was no one about, and none saw him as he fastened the skiff and slipped to his room. He locked the door, started to undress. Sudden sleep swept over him like a wave, drew him helplessly down into ocean depths of sleep.

A KNOCKING at his door awakened McKay, and the innkeeper's voice summoning him to dinner. Sleepily he answered, and as the old man's footsteps died away he roused himself. His eyes fell upon his coat, dry now, and the ill-erased blood-stains splotching it. Puzzled, he stared at them for a moment; then full memory clicked back into place.

He walked to the window. It was dusk. A wind was blowing and the trees

were singing, all the little leaves dancing; the forest hummed its cheerful vespers. Gone was all the unease, all the inarticulate trouble and the fear. The woods were tranquil and happy.

He sought the coppice through the gathering twilight. Its demoiselles were dancing lightly in the wind, leafy hoods dipping, leafy skirts ablow. Beside them marched their green troubadours, carefree, waving their needled arms. Gay was the little wood, gay as when its beauty had first lured him to it.

McKay hid the stained coat in his traveling-trunk, bathed and put on a fresh outfit and sauntered down to dinner. He ate excellently. Wonder now and then crossed his mind that he felt no regret, no sorrow even for the man he had killed. He was half inclined to believe it had all been only a dream—so little of any emotion did he feel. He had even ceased to think of what discovery might mean.

His mind was quiet; he heard the forest chanting to him that there was nothing he need fear; and when he sat for a time that night upon the balcony a peace that was half an ecstasy stole in upon him from the murmuring woods and enfolded him. Cradled by it he slept dreamlessly.

McKay did not go far from the inn that day. The little wood danced gayly and beckoned him, but he paid no heed. Something whispered to wait, to keep the lake between him and it until word came of what lay or had lain there. And the peace still was on him.

Only the old innkeeper seemed to grow uneasy as the hours went by. He went often to the landing, scanning the farther shore.

"It is strange," he said at last to McKay as the sun was dipping behind the summits. "Polleau was to see me here today. If he could not come he would have sent one of his sons."

McKay nodded, carelessly.

"There is another thing I do not understand," went on the old man. "I have seen no smoke from the lodge all day. It is as though they were not there."

"Where could they be?" asked McKay indifferently.

"I do not know," the voice was more perturbed. "It all troubles me, *M'sieu*. Polleau is hard, yes; but he is my neighbor. Perhaps an accident——"

"They would let you know soon enough if there was anything wrong," McKay said.

"Perhaps, but——" the old man hesitated. "If he does not come tomorrow and again I see no smoke, I will go to him," he ended.

McKay felt a little shock run through him; tomorrow, then, he would know, definitely, what it was that had happened in the little wood.

"I would if I were you," he said. "I'd not wait too long, either."

"Will you go with me, *M'sieu*?" asked the old man.

"No!" whispered the warning voice within McKay. "No! Do not go!"

"Sorry," he said, aloud. "But I've some writing to do. If you should need me, send back your man; I'll come."

And all that night he slept, again dreamlessly, while the crooning forest cradled him.

THE morning passed without sign from the opposite shore. An hour after noon he watched the old innkeeper and his man row across the lake. And suddenly McKay's composure was shaken, his serene certainty wavered. He unstrapped his field-glasses and kept them on the pair until they had beached the boat and entered the coppice. His heart was beating uncomfortably, his hands felt hot and his lips dry. How long had they

been in the wood? It must have been an hour! What were they doing there? What had they found? He looked at his watch, incredulously. Less than five minutes had passed.

Slowly the seconds ticked by. And it was all of an hour indeed before he saw them come out upon the shore and drag their boat into the water. McKay, throat curiously dry, deafening pulse within his ears, steadied himself, forced himself to stroll leisurely down to the landing.

"Everything all right?" he called as they were near. They did not answer, but as the skiff warped against the landing they looked up at him, and on their faces were stamped horror and a great wonder.

"They are dead, *M'sieu,*" whispered the innkeeper. "Polleau and his two sons —all dead!"

McKay's heart gave a great leap, a swift faintness took him.

"Dead!" he cried. "What killed them?"

"What but the trees, *M'sieu?*" answered the old man, and McKay thought that his gaze dwelt upon him strangely. "The trees killed them. See—we went up the little path through the wood, and close to its end we found it blocked by fallen trees. The flies buzzed round those trees, *M'sieu,* so we searched there. They were under them, Polleau and his sons. A fir had fallen upon Polleau and had crushed in his chest. Another son we found beneath a fir and upturned birches. They had broken his back, and an eye had been torn out—but that was no new wound, the latter."

He paused.

"It must have been a sudden wind," said his man; "yet I never knew of a wind such as that must have been. There were no trees down except those that lay upon them. And of those it was as though they had leaped out of the ground! Yes, as though they had leaped out of the ground upon them. Or it was as though giants had torn them out for clubs. They were not broken—their roots were bare——"

"But the other son—Polleau had two?" Try as he might, McKay could not keep the tremor out of his voice.

"Pierre," said the old man, and again McKay felt that strange quality in his gaze. "He lay beneath a fir. His throat was torn out!"

"His throat torn out!" whispered McKay. His knife! His knife! The knife that had been slipped into his hand by the shadowy shapes!

"His throat was torn out," repeated the innkeeper. "And in it still was the broken branch that had done it. A broken branch, *M'sieu,* pointed like a knife. It must have caught Pierre as the fir fell, and ripping through his throat, been broken off as the tree crashed."

McKay stood, mind whirling in wild conjecture. "You said—a broken branch?" he asked through lips gone white.

"A broken branch, *M'sieu.*" The innkeper's eyes searched him. "It was very plain — what it was that happened. Jacques," he turned to his man, "go up to the house."

He watched until the man shuffled out of sight.

"Yet not all is so plain, *M'sieu,*" he spoke low to McKay, "since in Pierre's hand I found—this."

He reached into a pocket and drew out a button from which hung a strip of cloth. They had once been part of that stained coat which McKay had hidden in his trunk. And as McKay strove to speak, the old man raised his hand. Button and cloth dropped from it, into the water. A wave took it and floated it away; another and another snatched it and

(Please turn to page 144)

THE EYRIE

THE following paragraph from *The New Yorker* has been called to our attention by a reader. It is from the pen of Alexander Woollcott: "And even though I am not free this fall to acquire merit by bus-riding in the Middle West, my mail affords me many glimpses of folkways in far places. In Rye, New Hampshire, for instance. There I have been interested in the nocturnal custom of a widow who, when the day's work is done, takes a lantern, goes to the cemetery, sits by her husband's grave, and reads the newspaper aloud to him. She does not read it all, but picks out just the items that would interest Henry. 'There must,' one of her relatives says, 'be something queer about anybody like that.'" This paragraph, with its weird and ghostly suggestions, has evidently been read by other readers of WEIRD TALES; for within the fortnight following the receipt of the clipping from *The New Yorker,* we received five story manuscripts built on the identical situation!

Shambleau, by C. L. Moore, in our November issue, won the most enthusiastic acclaim that any story in WEIRD TALES has received since Jack Williamson's tale, *The Wand of Doom,* which was published more than a year ago. In this case the editor's own preference was echoed by you, the readers; for the editor considered it one of the most strikingly different stories he had ever encountered. But the editor's taste was *not* echoed in the case of another story printed in this magazine within the last few months. We will not divulge the title of that story, but the editor considered it one of the best weird tales he had ever received; yet it was hardly mentioned at all in the votes and letters to the Eyrie.

H. P. Lovecraft, the dean of weird fiction writers, sums up the opinions of the readers in his own comment on *Shambleau,* in a letter to the editor. "*Shambleau* is great stuff," he writes. "It begins *magnificently,* on just the right note of terror, and with black intimations of the unknown. The subtle evil of the Entity, as suggested by the unexplained horror of the people, is extremely powerful—and the description of the Thing itself when unmasked is no letdown. It has real atmosphere and tension —rare things amidst the pulp traditions of brisk, cheerful, staccato prose and lifeless stock characters and images. The one major fault is the conventional interplanetary setting."

"*Shambleau* is one of the best weird stories that have ever appeared in WT, and it gets first place in the November issue," writes Julius Hopkins, of Washington, D. C. "*The War of the Sexes* was below Hamilton's standard—too much sex and not enough science. The living brain and mention of synthetic babies was the only science. I wish he would write more stories like *Crashing Suns*—I'll never forget that.

Price's *Lord of the Fourth Axis* didn't go quite far enough. I am sure we readers would like to have had the horrible hordes of the Master do some wholesale slaughtering, as in Howard's stories, before being stopped by the hero. *The Vampire Master*, by Hugh Davidson, is the best vampire story in a long time, and I anxiously await the remaining parts. As to a feature page for biographies of our authors, including photographs, I say let's have it. Begin with Seabury Quinn, follow with Lovecraft, and continue with Smith, Hamilton, Howard, Cave, etc."

Writes J. St. J. Pearson-Miller, of Carlisle, Pennsylvania: "It would indeed be chiseling if I did not let you know of the genuine pleasure I derive from WEIRD TALES. It is the one vehicle which transports me to my particular corner of fairyland with no stopovers to hear how utterly indispensable to the love-life of Whoosis is Whatsis. I like the sexy covers, but I will vote against them because they are misleading to those who do not know WEIRD TALES. One must mutilate the magazine before passing it on to his maiden aunt. Please get us another story similar to one which appeared about three years ago in which a fragment of the Blessed Sacrament was taken to a beehive and the bees made a church of wax to enshrine it. And will you tell us who wrote it? Thanks." [The story referred to is *The Tabernacle*, by the late Rev. Henry S. Whitehead. It appeared in WEIRD TALES for January, 1930.—THE EDITORS.]

"Your covers are O. K.," writes Walter C. Maxwell, of Cuero, Texas. "They are different from other magazine covers. The one on the November issue could not be beaten, and October's cover catches the eye. But please keep a little clothing on the girls."

A letter from Stephen R. Tucker, of Meriden, Connecticut, says: "I have not long been a fan of WEIRD TALES, but believe me I am going to read it every month now. When I was out to the Century of Progress, I looked around for a good magazine to read while riding on the train and found the September issue standing out over all the rest, and I immediately bought it. I have been buying them ever since. I understand, by reading the Eyrie, that you are having quite a discussion over cover designs. It doesn't make much difference to me whether or not there are nude women on your covers, although they seem to make the covers more attractive."

Hugh Hulsey, of Woodberry Forest, Virginia, writes to the Eyrie: "I noted in the November issue of WEIRD TALES a statement to the effect that 'the discussion as to whether we should use pictures of nude women on the covers of WEIRD TALES waxes hot and furious.' My opinion on that subject would be that as long as this type of cover illustration increases circulation, which I am sure it must do, by all means let it remain."

Guy Detrick, of Big Prairie, Ohio, writes to the Eyrie: "*The Vampire Master* quite made up for the omission of Seabury Quinn's stories in the November issue, I think. It was so interesting that I've read the second installment three times. *The War of the Sexes* got off to a very interesting start and ended with a surprize which I didn't expect. Well, at that, if we are still at war 20,000 years from now, the only difference is the way we fight. I say, continue to use nude pictures for covers, provided they illustrate the actual text of the story. Anyway, what's so shocking about a nude girl, when they're featured nearly everywhere, movies, advertising, art? I think we're all pretty well past the stage of being shocked by anything like that. So keep

the nudes, use them occasionally. They dress up the magazine. I wish you would use a good portrait of the handsome Jules de Grandin in a cover scene. I read every story he appears in."

A letter from Donald Allgeier, of Springfield, Missouri, says: "I believe that you want to attract the better class of readers to your excellent periodical. However, I do not believe that you are taking the right steps in this direction when you publish such covers as have appeared on recent issues. Brundage's talent could easily be turned into less vulgar channels, as is evidenced in his work on the October number. Make your covers weird; nudity is not weird. Don't scare away those worthwhile readers; it is all right to do without the patronage of the shallow sex-lover. I hate to tear off the covers of my copies of WT, but I can't afford to have my family see such works of art and gather the wrong impression of what I read. I am sure that most of your readers will agree with me on this point. Your October issue was not only all right in this respect, but was excellent in story content. The new serial promises to be just what you said it was. Williamson does it again in *The Plutonian Terror*. One of the best things you ever did was securing him to write for you. De Grandin and Conan are even better than usual this time, but I would like a revival of Solomon Kane. *The House of the Worm*, by Mearle Prout, is an excellent piece of work, and the shorts are very good."

"I just finished the November issue and thought all the stories were fine," writes Leroy Engler, of Uniontown, Alabama. "I missed Jules de Grandin and that friend of his, Doctor Trowbridge. Please give us more of them in the next issue. As for the interplanetary stories, bring 'em on. I thought Williamson's *The Horror on the Asteroid* in the last issue one of the best yet; also liked *Golden Blood* very much."

A reader from Newton Highlands, Massachusetts, who signs himself S. J. S., says: "I have been reading WEIRD TALES for five months and have come to the conclusion that it is one of the best fiction magazines ever published and absolutely *the* best of its type."

Kathryn Rogers, of Russell, Pennsylvania, writes to the Eyrie: "I've read your magazine for just one year and I've saved all the copies. My favorite authors are Robert E. Howard, Seabury Quinn, Clark Ashton Smith, H. P. Lovecraft, and E. Hoffmann Price, in the order named. Edmond Hamilton is another of my favorites. I've noticed the discussions in the Eyrie about scientific stories for 'our' WEIRD TALES. I rather like one or two, but not more. After all, WEIRD TALES is a magazine of vampires, witchcraft, werewolves, etc. I am crazy about Howard's Conan tales; I believe the best story I ever read in your magazine was *The Scarlet Citadel*."

G. W. Hockley writes from New Brighton, in far-away New Zealand: "I must write just a few lines in appreciation of the July WEIRD TALES. The good old magazine is consistently excellent, and the July issue certainly rang the bell. It was especially welcome for the reappearance of the one and only H. P. Lovecraft. *The Dreams in the Witch-House* is in a class by itself, and shows that this peerless weird-story author is as good as ever he was. It is the best story in your magazine since the same writer's *Dunwich Horror* of 1929. Full marks must also be given to Hazel Heald for that eery tale, *The Horror in the Museum*, which ranks next to Lovecraft's story as the most engrossing bit of horror-fiction you have published for a long time. And finally, a whole lot of appreciation for Clark Ashton Smith's wonderful short

story, *Ubbo-Sathla.* A masterpiece, this; I enjoyed it immensely. I am inclined to agree with your correspondents who have been criticizing interplanetary stories. I enjoy this type of story, *in its place,* but to find a place in your magazine they must be truly *weird.* Reprints have been much more interesting of late, but we can't have too many from earlier issues of WT. Please reprint *Bells of Oceana* by Arthur J. Burks and *The Canal* by Everil Worrell."

"I have just finished the November WT," writes Alonzo Leonard, of Portsmouth, Ohio, "and I must say that it is the best I have read in a long, long time. Each number for the past several months has been excellent—of course—but there has been a story or two in each which has been a little weak; but in the November issue every story from first to last has been, for its type, a top-notcher. Even the interplanetary story, *Shambleau,* was good. For once an author hasn't read the *War-lord of Mars* and then rushed to the typewriter to dash off a yarn about a superman and a princess. *The War of the Sexes* was much better than I thought possible for a story of this kind to be. Thanks, Edmond. And now I want to say a few words about *Shambleau* and *The Holiness of Azedarac.* Here are two stories which are unusual in the pulp magazines. The usual type always runs to a formula—the hero must never, never lean toward anything which isn't commonplace and conventional; but here are two heroes who violate that rule. The last paragraph of *Shambleau* shows the character of Northwest Smith, and I can stretch out my hand and pat him on the back for being *human.* And the same goes for Brother Ambrose in *The Holiness of Azedarac.* He too shows his manliness by going back from his own time to an earlier one, just for a woman. A true son of Adam!"

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? *Shambleau,* that utterly strange story by C. L. Moore, was your favorite in the November issue, as shown by your votes and letters, and your second choice was part two of Hugh Davidson's serial, *The Vampire Master.*

My favorite stories in the January WEIRD TALES are:

Story	Remarks
(1)_____	_____
(2)_____	_____
(3)_____	_____

I do not like the following stories:

(1)_____ Why?_____

(2)_____ _____

It will help us to know what kind of stories you want in Weird Tales if you will fill out this coupon and mail it to The Eyrie, Weird Tales, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Reader's name and address:

_____

_____

_____

Possession

By JULIUS LONG

A short and amazing tale of hypnotism and dual personality

WHEN I beheld Anderson's face as he emerged from Doctor Silvara's inner office, I expected the worst. His manner was easy and calm. Years of intimacy had taught me that my nervous and excitable friend was serene and tranquil only when face to face with some inevitable misfortune.

I had never before seen him so cool. Never before had he been confronted with a catastrophe so dire and unavoidable. I knew that he was doomed to die. In his bosom he carried the fatal seed of extinction. It would soon expand within him until it had suffocated the last small remnant of vitality.

"Let us take a bus," he said.

We climbed to the top of a Fifth Avenue bus and occupied a front seat. Slowly we progressed down 57th Street to the Drive. I could not bring myself to question Anderson concerning the interview. I anticipated the answer and did not wish to make him repeat his own death sentence; yet I feared he might interpret my silence as indifference. He must have sensed my dilemma, for he turned and spoke to me. His tone was utterly casual.

"You may not know it, but you are riding with what is virtually a corpse. I have but two weeks to live. Doctor Silvara was very precise about it. Two weeks exactly. I must be careful not to live thirteen days, or fifteen. That would seriously undermine the doctor's reputation for infallibility."

I was appalled by this ghastly raillery. One expects a certain measure of dignity in a man on the threshold of death. But the speech was characteristic of Anderson. He could take nothing seriously, not even his own demise.

"You must resign at once," I told him. "You must use these two precious weeks to complete your book."

Anderson was professor of psychology, and he had intimated to me that his latest work was based upon a discovery that would revolutionize the science of psychology.

He laughed cynically. "Nothing matters to me, except my own life," he said. "If I am not to live to enjoy my fame, why strive for it?"

I was surprized by this selfish attitude, but said nothing about it.

"I shall have to find someone else to put me to sleep at night," I observed, more to break the silence than anything else. I had suffered from insomnia for years, and not until Anderson had come to my aid with hypnotic treatment had I enjoyed relief. Every night thereafter, he would come to my apartment, which was in the same building as his own, and repeat his treatment. I became so responsive to his efforts that he could send me off to sleep merely by uttering a few soothing words. I was conscious that my suggestibility had reached a stage where my friend might abuse his trust. I knew very well that prolonged hypnotic treatment subordinates the mind of the subject to that of the operator, but Anderson

(Please turn to page 138)

Coming Next Month

THERE was no altar—only the mouth of a great well-like shaft in the stone floor, with strange obscene carvings all about the rim. I tore great pieces of stone from the rotting floor and cast them down the shaft which slanted down into utter darkness. I heard them bound along the side, but I did not hear them strike bottom. I cast down stone after stone, each with a searing curse, and at last I heard a sound that was not the dwindling rumble of the falling stones. Up from the well floated a weird demon-piping that was a symphony of madness. Far down in the darkness I glimpsed the faint fearful glimmering of a vast white bulk.

I retreated slowly as the piping grew louder, falling back through the broad doorway. I heard a scratching, scrambling noise, and up from the shaft and out of the doorway between the colossal columns came a prancing incredible figure. It went erect like a man, but it was covered with hair like fur, that was shaggiest where its face should have been. If it had ears, nose and a mouth I could not discover them. Only a pair of staring red eyes leered from the furry mask. Its misshapen hands held a strange set of pipes, on which it blew weirdly as it pranced toward me with many a grotesque caper and leap.

Behind it I heard a repulsive obscene noise as of a quaking unstable mass heaving up out of a well. Then I nocked an arrow, drew the cord and sent the shaft singing through the furry breast of the dancing monstrosity. It went down as though struck by a thunderbolt, but to my horror the piping continued, though the pipes had fallen from the malformed hands. Then I turned and ran fleetly to the column, up which I swarmed before I looked back. When I reached the pinnacle I looked, and because of the shock and surprize of what I saw, I almost fell from my dizzy perch.

Out of the temple the monstrous dweller in the darkness had come, and I, who had expected a horror yet cast in some terrestrial mold, looked on the spawn of nightmare. . . .

What it was that crawled out of the old temple makes a thrilling, hair-raising episode in a fascinating story that is replete with vivid thrills and horror. It will be published complete in next month's WEIRD TALES:

THE VALLEY OF THE WORM

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

—ALSO—

THE SAPPHIRE GODDESS

By NICTZIN DYALHIS

A wholly unusual and thrilling weird story of terrific adventures and another dimension of space—by the author of "When the Green Star Waned."

THE MAN WHO RETURNED

By EDMOND HAMILTON

The story of a man who was thought to be dead and the reception he got when he returned to his friends and family.

THE PLACE OF HAIRY DEATH

By ANTHONY M. RUD

A tale of a horde of venomous spiders and two men—one brave, the other not so brave—in a hidden treasure-room of the Mayas.

THE VIRUS OF HELL

By WILLIAM H. POPE

A grim, prophetic story of fifty years from now, when Organized Crime rules the United States, and a ghastly dew falls from the sky, menacing all human life.

TARBIS OF THE LAKE

By E. HOFFMANN PRICE

She was a living, breathing woman with a living woman's passion—but what was the thing that lay in the mummy-case like a corpse within its coffin?

February WEIRD TALES Out February 1

(Continued from page 136)

had never caused me to doubt his good will.

"Do not worry about the future until it is the present," he said lightly.

THAT night, he came as usual to my rooms and began his operations with great impatience. I accepted this as natural, assuming that he wished to be through to rush back to his book.

In the few seconds before I went to sleep, I was struck by the unusual appearance of his face. The light had been extinguished, and only the soft moonlight illuminated the room. His features were shadowed. Even his blond hair appeared black and sharply outlined. His eyes seemed to appear from the impenetrable recesses of bottomless wells. His thin lips spoke with scarcely perceptible movements. I had never seen a countenance so diabolical, and in the fraction of a second before I lost consciousness, I regretted that I had let myself become so dependent upon the man.

Throughout the night, I dreamed strange nightmares, which, upon awakening, I could not call to mind. I knew only that they had been horrible and gruesome. During the day, I was tired and weary, as if I had not slept the previous night. Throughout my English classes, I stammered and stuttered. My students did not conceal their suspicion that I had dissipated, and they exchanged amused glances.

The next day and the days after that, my condition grew worse. Then there occurred an incident which tried my credulity.

It happened during my eleven o'clock class. I was lecturing on the idiosyncrasies of Laurence Sterne, when I noticed a stirring and uneasiness in my listeners. I paused an instant and continued. The students again became attentive. At the end of the hour, I summoned one of them to my desk.

"There seemed to be some irregularity during my lecture," I said. "Did I commit some frightful blunder?"

The student stammered hesitatingly. "Out with it!" I commanded impatiently.

"We were wondering," he confided, "why you broke off your lecture to give us a discourse on the symptoms of agoraphobia. It was all very interesting, but it seemed a bit unusual to hear such information in a lecture on Sterne."

"I can believe that," I said. "That will do. Thank you very much."

During lunch, I racked my brain to account for this strange lapse. The circumstance that puzzled me most of all was that I knew absolutely nothing of agoraphobia. I doubt that I had ever heard of it before. I decided to consult Anderson. He taught the neuroses. He would know all about the disease. Besides, he might be able to explain my unusual experience.

That night I told him of it, but he was very vague. "You mustn't take your experiences too seriously," he said.

That night's sleep was suffused with mad dreams whose hideous content was too elusive for me to recapture upon awakening. That day was more tedious and annoying than those previous. The strange incident of the day before was complicated by an astounding discovery. A student came to me after class and reported that a similar phenomenon had occurred during Professor Anderson's eleven o'clock lecture on the neuroses. Without warning, he discontinued his lecture on agoraphobia and spoke eloquently of the style of Laurence Sterne. I was assured that he supplied the very information that I omitted from my own lecture.

I SPENT the rest of the day trying to account for this strange phenomenon. Had Anderson's personality been exchanged with my own? What could cause such an unnatural occurrence? I could not believe that there existed between Anderson and me a mutual sympathy of such intensity that it would give rise to a supernatural phenomenon. Indeed, I had begun to feel that he hated me for my healthy body and the years I was to outlive him. His manner had become subtly strained, though outwardly he manifested the same friendship.

I confronted him with the fact of his own simultaneous lapse, and he simulated surprize which did not deceive me. Why did he try to pass the whole affair off as a commonplace occurrence? I suspected that even then he was attempting to allay my suspicion.

That night, I was frightened by a nightmare which I could later recall. Indeed, I remembered it so vividly that I refused to think it a dream. Here are the details:

I was awakened in the middle of the night by an almost unendurable pain in my lungs. Gasping for breath, I climbed out of bed. My limbs weighed heavily, and my muscles were unresponsive. I was conscious that I was a very sick man.

With difficulty I made my way to the window. Not until I stared down into the street below, did I discover that I was not in my own apartment. My rooms open only on 112th Street. I found myself looking down into Broadway. I reflected a moment. Had I spent the night with someone? I instantly recalled that I had not.

I looked about myself. The clothes that hung carelessly over chairs were not my own, yet they were strangely familiar. In the moonlight I caught a glimpse of my hands. I started in horror. They

THROUGH space to the most distant corners of the universe in the twinkling of an eye! When Scheherazade told her Sultan the tales that make up *The Arabian Nights Entertainments*, she told him of a Magic Carpet that flew through the sky and carried its human cargo to distant countries with the speed of thought.

The MAGIC CARPET Magazine, like the carpet of Scheherazade, carries its readers out of the humdrum life of our modern civilization to lands of romance, adventure, mystery and glamor. It will transport you quickly through the air to Timbukru, to Egypt, to the Vale of Kashmere, to Bagdad, to Suva, to Istanbul. It will even fly backward into the departed glories of past ages. And unlike the carpet of Scheherazade, our MAGIC CARPET will make an occasional trip to distant planets and far suns in the remote corners of the galaxy. Among the authofs who contribute to The MAGIC CARPET Magazine are:

Seabury Quinn
Edmond Hamilton
Hugh B. Cave
H. Bedford-Jones
Warren Hastings Miller
Otis Adelbert Kline
E. Hoffmann Price
James W. Bennett
Robert E. Howard

Climb aboard and fly with us through space with the speed of thought and enjoy a wide variety of fascinating fiction which expresses to the full the lure and mystery of far places.

See your magazine dealer today!

New Issue Now On Sale

were bony and almost devoid of flesh. I rushed through a door, which I thought would lead to the hallway. I found myself in a bathroom. I searched for a switch and snapped on the light. I saw at once that I was in Anderson's apartment. I turned and stared at my reflection in the mirror.

The face I beheld was the sickly and sallow visage of Anderson!

Oblivion folded over me.

Such was my dream — or was it a dream? I was racked by the terrible suspicion that the experience was not imaginary, but real. There was about my memory of it a persistent vividness that was very unlike the fading recollection of a dream.

Was my soul temporarily transferred into the dying body of my friend? Had the unaccountable experience in the classroom been repeated? The thought nearly drove me mad.

I recalled Anderson's strange manner, his seeming indifference to death. Could it have been that he expected to live—to live on in my body after his own had succumbed to the ravages of his disease? Was he transferring his soul into my flesh? How could this be so?

I remembered his hints of the tremendous discovery he had made, of its revolutionary effects on psychological theory. Was this interchange of personalities a demonstration of his power, a ghastly experiment which was to give him new life, perhaps enable him to live on through the centuries? Was I his chosen victim? Was my own soul to be transferred into his decadent body, to die with it?

I did not know how to answer these questions, but I resolved to confront Anderson with them. That night when he came to repeat his hypnosis,I eyed him sternly.

"Your experiment is over," I said boldly. "You will never again hypnotize me."

His eyebrows lifted with more amusement than surprize. I shuddered as I looked at his emaciated features. If Doctor Silvara's prediction were correct, he had only two more days to live. I marvelled that he managed to drag himself to classes.

"Whether you want me to hypnotize you or not, makes very little difference," he said evenly. "You are no longer in a position to command. You are so suggestible to my treatment that it is not in your power to resist it."

I winced at this, but faced him with all the courage I could muster. "You flatter yourself," I said. "You have dominated my mind only because I was fool enough to trust you. I know not what knowledge and skill is at your command, but I realize now what you have been attempting to do. You will fail. In a very few days you will be dead."

Anderson laughed. "So you have discovered my little secret? Yes, I have worked every night with you, and last night I almost succeeded. Tonight, I will. It will not be I who will be dead in a few days, but you. That will be the reward of my genius. I am the first to prove that the soul is a separate psychic entity that can be completely divorced from the body! My soul will not live in another world, but on for ever in this one, in the bodies of men whose will is less strong than mine. 'Man doth not yield him to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will.' "

I was discountenanced by the conviction with which he spoke these words. I recognized them as Joseph Glanvill's, which had been quoted by Poe in *Ligeia.*

(Please turn to page 142)

SAVE $1.50

ON YOUR SUBSCRIPTION TO

WEIRD TALES

And Accept This Special Offer

You may have experienced difficulty at times in finding WEIRD TALES on the newsstands. For this magazine sells out early and many small newsdealers don't like to re-order a supply after publication date.

So make sure of getting WEIRD TALES every month by entering your subscription now and accepting this special money-saving offer.

The regular price of a two-year subscription is $6.00. But by filling out the coupon below, you can secure WEIRD TALES for two years for $4.50—a worthwhile saving of $1.50.

Or you may order a year's subscription for yourself and another for a friend at the special price of $4.50.

MAIL THIS COUPON TODAY
and SAVE $1.50

WEIRD TALES, Dept. 1,
840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

For the enclosed remittance of $_____ enter the following subscriptions at these rates: (1 year—$3.00) 2 years—$4.50, saving $1.50 (Send either one 2-year subscription or two 1-year subscriptions).

Name _____ Address _____

Name _____ Address _____

(Continued from page 140)

I felt helpless to cope with the knowledge which was at Anderson's disposal. Nevertheless, I put up a brave front and replied boldly, "It is not I who am weak, but you. If you do not leave this instant, I will take you by the collar and throw you out."

Anderson only laughed and moved carelessly toward me. His face was so withered by disease and his body was so frail that I could not bring myself to touch him. He began slowly to repeat the words he had used for years to induce sleep into my nerves. I struggled not to listen to them, to fight them off. I felt a numbness creep upon me. My God! was I so weak-willed that I was to lose this battle for my life? I could hear nothing but Anderson's monotonous voice. I knew that I was lost. My mind became befuddled and my vision befogged. Sleep invested my body. Anderson had won.

When I regained consciousness, I only slowly recalled the terrible scene. I switched on the light and looked at the clock. It was four in the morning. I noticed at once that I was in my own room. Thank heaven, Anderson, though he had succeeded in hypnotizing me, had failed to effect the transference! But my joy was of short duration. I began suddenly to cough. I reached for a handkerchief, and beheld my arms and hands. They were the bony, yellow arms and hands of Anderson! I did not trouble to look into a mirror. I knew that I dwelt in the dying body of my false friend.

I heard a sound and turned about. Anderson stood in the doorway. But it was I who seemed to appear there; it was *my* body, *my* face that I saw!

Anderson smiled amusedly. "Well, you see what has happened. There is nothing you can do now to save yourself. You must die with the miserable body that houses your soul."

A fit of uncontrollable rage shook me. "You devil!" I cried, "I will kill you for this. Both of us shall die!"

I rushed wildly to the bureau and opened a drawer. Anderson suspected that there was a revolver there, and he sprang after me.

"Oh, no, you don't," he said, pinioning my arms.

I struggled with all my pitiable strength. He held me fast. I gave a last, violent lunge. I tore myself from him and faced him. My victory was short-lived. While I regarded him furiously, gasping for breath, my very lungs seemed to collapse. Blood filled my mouth and nostrils.

Anderson watched me sardonically.

My knees sagged under me, and I fell to the floor. The pain was insufferable. I was choked, unable to breathe. I knew I was dying. Blackness enveloped me.

A second later, I found myself standing, reeling on my feet. On the floor below me lay the body of Anderson. It was bathed in blood. I realized at once that he had suffered a frightful hemorrhage. I stooped to his assistance. I felt his pulse. He was quite dead.

In a flash, the memory of all that had happened came to me. I rose to my feet and looked at the dead man with utter stupefaction. What had happened? What had saved me, restored my soul to its own body?

The only answer I can give is that the spirit is more inextricably rooted to its corporeal form than Anderson had suspected. Though he had indeed effected a complete metempsychosis, death had undone his work.

I simply told the coroner that he had been taken very ill and rushed frantically into my apartment, where he had succumbed from his hemorrhage. It is a pity his genius has been lost to the world.

LARGEST AND FINEST ROOMS IN

CLEVELAND

150 ROOMS WITH BATH, $2.50
150 ROOMS WITH BATH, $3.00
150 ROOMS WITH BATH, $3.50

FOR TWO PERSONS
$4, $5, $5.50

Finest food from all-electric kitchens. Low rates. Unusual Coffee Shop. Dining and dancing nightly in season in the famous Rainbow Room. 2,000-car garage in connection.

Folsom B. Taylor
Managing Director

CARTER HOTEL

Play A Tune
In 10 Minutes

On your Spanish Guitar, Uke, Tenor Banjo, Mandolin or Banjo Mandolin. No knowledge of music necessary. No practice. Play first by number, then by note. Simply attach E-Z Player to your favorite instrument—press numbered keys and play.

FREE

instruction book with numbered tunes and chords comes with every E-Z Player. Start playing popular tunes by number right off the reel. Be the life of the party—the center of attraction—a radio star. Don't wait. Write today for 7-Day Free Trial Offer. A postcard will do.

FERRY SPECIALTIES, INC.,
Dept. M-323 Evanston, Ill.

WHICH CONTROLS YOU?

Science says that the chemical elements composing a man's body may be bought for sixty cents at a pharmacy shop. But the real part of you is the infinite, creative power within—it makes YOU a living, vital being.

By the proper use of this creative, sleeping force within you, you can DOMINATE YOUR LIFE and MASTER THE CONDITIONS WHICH SURROUND YOU. The Rosicrucians have shown thousands of thinking men and women how to use this infinite power. Learn to direct the inner processes of your mind.

This Free Book Explains

The Rosicrucians will send the SINCERE SEEKER a free copy of the new book, "The Wisdom of the Sages," which tells how you may become a student of these age-old truths. Address a letter (not a postcard of curiosity) to:

Friar I. C. A.

ROSICRUCIAN BROTHERHOOD
AMORC
SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA

Read our monthly magazine, "The Rosicrucian Digest," at your Public Library.

By Clark Ashton Smith

THE DOUBLE SHADOW & five other fantasies

For lovers of weird atmosphere and arabesque imagination. Unpublished heretofore. Send 25c (coin) to Clark Ashton Smith, Auburn, Calif., for postpaid copy.

Weird Tales
is on sale the 1st of
every month

BACK ISSUES

For complete list and prices write to WEIRD TALES, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

ASTHMA HAY FEVER BRONCHITIS

SUFFERING OVERCOME—*Quickly, Safely!*

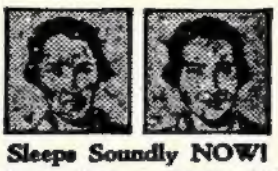
Ama-Gon, amazing new California home treatment, quickly stops Asthma, Bronchitis, Hay Fever suffering. Absolutely SAFE for young or old. No matter how many remedies you have tried, Ama-Gon quickly overcomes that awful wheezing, choking sensation and enables you to breathe FREELY, EASILY again. Promotes sound, restful sleep. We want YOU to prove its value to YOURSELF WITHOUT RISKING ONE CENT

MAIL COUPON NOW FOR FREE BOOK

ACCEPT 8-DAY TRIAL OFFER

AMA-GON LABORATORIES,
Dept. 70, 1500 N. Vermont, Los Angeles, California.
Accept 8-DAY TRIAL OFFER, and FREE Book about Asthma, Bronchitis, Hay Fever, WITHOUT COST.
Name_____
Address_____ City_____

BEFORE AFTER



Sleeps Soundly NOW!

"I suffered 15 yrs. with Bronchial Asthma," wrote Mrs. R. Chavez, 280 S. Palm St., Ventura, Calif., "Tried everything without relief. After using 1½ bottles of Ama-Gon I feel like a new person. Got rid of my wheezing and now sleep soundly the whole night thru."

NEXT MONTH

The Sapphire Goddess

By NICTZIN DYALHIS

THIS is the most amazing story that Mr. Dyalhis has written since he startled the literary world nine years ago with "When the Green Star Waned." It is a wholly unusual and thrilling weird story of terrific adventures in another dimension of space.

A DESTITUTE, ordinary man of forty-eight years, contemplating suicide as the best way out of his troubles, is suddenly projected into the Fourth Dimension, and finds himself in a fight to the death for the Chrysolite Throne and power unthinkable. The heroic, astounding and well-nigh incredible tale of how he met the weird experiences that came to him is something that you can not afford to miss. This glorious thrill-tale will be published complete

in the February issue of

WEIRD TALES

On sale February 1st

To avoid missing your copy, clip and mail this coupon today for SPECIAL SUBSCRIPTION OFFER.

WEIRD TALES
840 N. Michigan Ave.,
Chicago, Ill.

Enclosed find $1.00 for which send me the next five issues of WEIRD TALES to begin with the February issue ($1.75 in Canada). Special offer void unless remittance is accompanied by coupon.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

The Woman of the Wood

(Continued from page 131)

passed it on. They watched it, silently, until it had vanished.

"Tell me nothing," said the keeper of the inn. "Polleau was a hard man, and hard men were his sons. The trees hated them. The trees killed them. The—souvenir—is gone. Only *M'sieu* would better also—go."

THAT night McKay packed. When dawn had broken he stood at his window, looking long at the little wood. It too was awakening, stirring sleepily—like drowsy, delicate demoiselles. He thought he could see that one slim birch that was—what? Tree or woman? Or both?

Silently, the old landlord and his wife watched him as he swung out his car—a touch of awe, a half-fear, in their eyes. Without a word they let him go.

And as McKay swept up the road that led over the lip of the green bowl, he seemed to hear from all the forest a deep-toned, mournful chanting. It arose around him as he topped the rise in one vast whispering cloud—of farewell—and died.

Never, he knew, would that green door of enchantment be opened to him again. His fear had closed it—for ever. Something had been offered to him beyond mortal experience—something that might have raised him to the level of the gods of Earth's youth. He had rejected it. And nevermore, he knew, would he cease to regret.

Coming soon—
SATAN'S GARDEN
By E. HOFFMANN PRICE

Watch for this story
in WEIRD TALES

Do You Read
The MAGIC CARPET Magazine?

The Shadow of the Vulture
By ROBERT E. HOWARD

A stirring tale of Suleyman the Magnificent, Sultan of Turkey, and the breath-taking events at the siege of Vienna, when Christendom stood at bay and a red-headed girl held the fate of Europe in her hands.

The Spider Woman
By SEABURY QUINN

A terrific adventure of Carlos the Tiger in the Netherlands, and a lovely woman spy who told him how to conquer a Spanish stronghold.

The River of Perfumes
By WARREN HASTINGS MILLER

She drove men to madness by her sheer beauty, this little maid of Indo-China—a fascinating Oriental tale of love, lust, and sudden death, and a wild adventure.

The Little Affair of the Eiffel Tower
By ARTHUR MORRIS CROSBY

Henri the Fox scorned to use the gross means of hired assassins, but his methods were just as effective—a tale of the Paris underworld.

Passport to the Desert
By G. G. PENDARVES

Algeria—a story of intrigue and a perilous adventure involving an American girl and an Arab bandit and slave-dealer.

Alleys of Darkness
By PATRICK ERVIN

A story of Singapore and Dennis Dorgan, hardest-fisted slugger in the merchant marine, and the maze of intrigue that enmeshed him.

Speed Planes for Moscow
By S. GORDON GURWIT

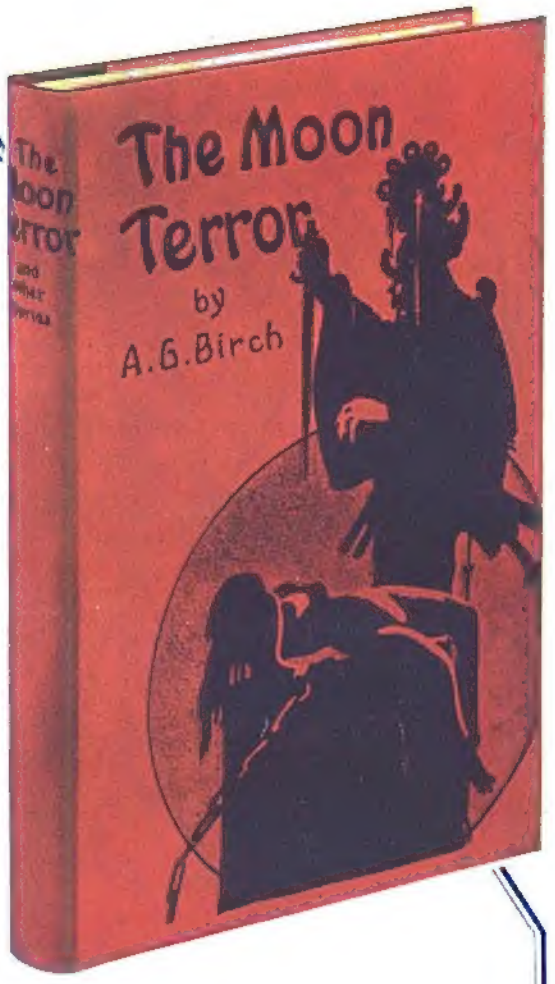
A thrilling tale of the Russian Five Year Plan and a romance that was surrounded with perils and death.

READ

NOW ON SALE

THE PHANTOM OF THE ETHER

THE first warning of the stupendous cataclysm that befell the earth in the fourth decade of the Twentieth Century was recorded simultaneously in several parts of America. At twelve minutes past 3 o'clock a. m., during a lull in the night's aerial business, several of the larger stations of the Western hemisphere began picking up strange signals out of the ether. They were faint and ghostly, as if coming from a vast distance. As far as anyone could learn, the signals originated nowhere upon the earth. *It was as if some phantom were whispering through the ether in the language of another planet.*



FREE BOOK

For Lovers of Fantastic Fiction

READ the thrilling adventures of Dr. Ferdinand Gresham, the eminent American astronomer, in his encounters with Kwo-Sung-tao, high priest of the Seuen-H'sin (the Sect of Two Moons). This colony of sorcerers is the most murderously diabolical breed of human beings ever known. Each turn of the page increases the suspense when you follow Dr. Gresham (in disguise) to take part in the hellish ceremonies in the Temple of the Moon God—when he crosses the Mountains of Fear—half starves on the dead plains of Dzunsz'chuen—swims the River of Death—sleeps in the Caves of Nganhwiu, where the hot winds never cease and the dead light their campfires on their journey to Nirvana. Here is a story that *will* thrill you.

This book is beautifully bound in rich cloth, with an attractive colored jacket. It will make an excellent gift to a friend or a valuable addition to your own library. For a limited time, the Publishers of WEIRD TALES are giving this book away with each six months' subscription to the magazine. Simply send $1.50, the regular six months' subscription price for WEIRD TALES, and this book will be sent to you without further cost. Address: WEIRD TALES, Dept. S-42, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.